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News and Perspectives

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AGRO-ECOLOGY

Science and Education for a Sustainable Agriculture



Volume 14 • Number 1

Illinois Organic Production Conference a Success

SPRING 2005

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by Dan Anderson

After nearly a year of planning by the University of Illinois Extension Organic Task Force, the state's first production conference devoted solely to organic practices and products was held January 12–13 in Normal. By all measures the event was successful in drawing a range of farmers from across Illinois and neighboring states and delivering quality, research-based information on a broad array of organic topics. To view the PowerPoint presentations from the conference, go to <http://www.aces.uiuc.edu/asap/conf/>.

The conference opened with a keynote presentation from long-time Iowa Extension researcher Jerry DeWitt. Jerry's beautiful photographs and first-hand accounts from farmers and rural communities across the country were the perfect start for the two-day event. The remainder of the day was spent exploring certification and marketing issues. Jim Riddle of Policy Specialists for Organic Independents in Minnesota, one of the world's foremost authorities on organic certification, answered many questions about USDA organic rules and the certification process. Three additional speakers presented practical information on numerous marketing avenues for organic products. The day ended with a three-farmer panel, representing grain, vegetable, and mixed crop/livestock production systems, followed by a reception with an array of organic offerings.

Day 2, focusing on production issues, was structured around four tracks—grain crops, specialty crops, livestock, and miscellaneous topics. The speakers were mostly Illinois extension educators, researchers from the U of I College of Agricultural, Consumer and Environmental Sciences, and farmers.

The Holiday Inn's Chef Tony prepared delicious meals and treats with 100% organic ingredients for conference attendees. Finding (mostly) local, organic food for 180 people in the middle of winter was a challenge. The conference planners spent many hours choosing menus, calling local farmers and other food outlets, tracking down all the food required, and delivering it to the hotel.

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Agro-Ecology News and Perspectives is published by the College of Agricultural, Consumer and Environmental Sciences, Agroecology/Sustainable Agriculture Program, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign (UIUC). This newsletter is designed to inform its readers about the well being of human and natural communities through the adoption of agricultural practices and farming systems that are economically viable, environmentally sound, and socially just. This issue was edited by Deborah Cavanaugh-Grant and Debra Levey Larson, designed by Scherer Communications and produced by Roberts Design Company. Copy editing by Molly Bentsen. Photos not credited in this issue were taken by Debra Levey Larson.

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College of Agricultural,
Consumer and
Environmental Sciences

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If you would like to receive future issues of Agro-Ecology News and Perspectives, contact Deborah Cavanaugh-Grant (217-968-5512; cvnighgrn@uiuc.edu).

Acrobat PDF files of this and past issues are available at <http://www.aces.uiuc.edu/asap/news/newspersp.html>.

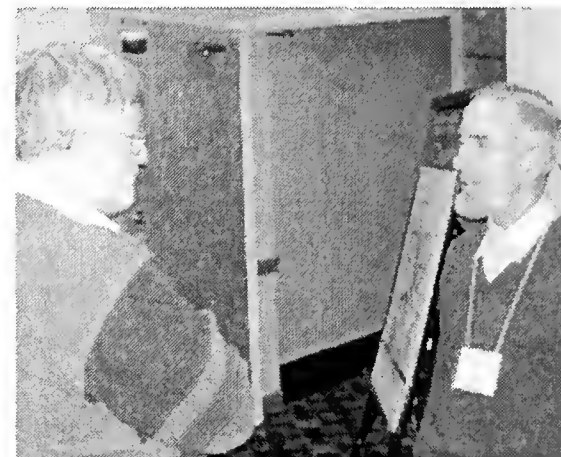
Organic Conference, continued



In concurrent presentations on integrated pest management, Darin Eastburn (left), U of I associate professor of crop sciences, speaks about IPM in agronomic crops, while Elizabeth Wahle, Extension specialist in horticulture, talks about IPM for fruits and vegetables.

Food ultimately played a role in cutting short the number of people we could register for the meeting. With this being the first conference exclusively addressing organic production, the task force didn't know how many people to expect. The goal was 120, and plans to feed that number were secure. Ten days before the meeting, pre-registrations began pouring in, and we quickly surpassed our goal with no end in sight. We decided to close preregistration but accept walk-in registrants with the understanding that we could not promise them meals. Ultimately, 180 people attended, more than 100 of them actual farmers. Everyone was fed, and participants left at the end of day 2 in the midst of a snowstorm with their bags stuffed with resources and their brains full of the opportunities for an increasingly bright organic farming future! 🌱

Dan Anderson is a research specialist in the College of Agricultural, Consumer and Environmental Sciences at the University of Illinois (217-333-1588; aslan@uiuc.edu).



Organic grower Marvin Manges of Yale, Illinois, speaks with conference sponsor Maynard Knopf from Prairie Hybrids in the conference display area.



Jim Riddle (right) addresses the questions of growers after his keynote presentation on organic standards. Riddle is a Minnesota organic grower and certifier and a member of the National Organic Standards Board.

Mark your calendars now for the
Second Annual Illinois Organic
Production Conference.

January 11-12, 2006
(location to be announced).

2005 U OF I SUSTAINABLE AGRICULTURE TOURS SCHEDULED

by Debra Levey Larson



An employee at Baxter winery in Nauvoo, Illinois puts some grapes into the hopper to be crushed and made into wine. Photo taken on one of the 2004 tours.

Photo by David Riecks

The Agroecology/Sustainable Agriculture Program is pleased to be hosting again this year a slate of sustainable agriculture tours. The tours support the program's goals of promoting research and spotlighting alternative farming practices as well as ways to secure adequate and dependable farm income.

"This is the third year that we've offered sustainable ag tours around the state," said Deborah Cavanaugh-Grant, the University of Illinois research specialist who is coordinating the tours. "Illinois has a lot of creative farmers and entrepreneurs who are willing to open up their farms and businesses for a behind-the-scenes look. They are very honest in sharing what has worked for them and what they will never try again. It's a great learning experience."

The first tour, "A Closer Look at Sustainability," will be held on Wednesday, May 25, at the Center for Sustainable Community in Stelle, Illinois. Participants will get a look at the community's solar-powered telephone company, which also provides high-speed wireless Internet service; its windmill-supported potable water treatment facility; organic and permaculture oriented gardens. The day includes lunch prepared with some of Stelle's organically raised foods. For more information about the community, visit www.CenterForSustainableCommunity.org.

The second tour, "Organics from Seed to Table," on Thursday, June 23, begins with a presentation about an organic vegetable project at the University of Illinois South Farms and includes a visit to Jon Cherniss's Blue Moon Farm. Intensive organic vegetable production is one of three transitional farming systems being compared in the U of I project to determine how differences in management intensity and organic-matter inputs affect weeds, soil organic matter, nutrient availability, soil organisms, and the relationship between soil fertility, plant health, and insect/disease pressure.

There will be two tours in July. On Wednesday, July 13, participants in "Organic Vegetables, Greens and Herbs Grown in Intensive Beds" will visit Growing Home Farm in Marseilles, Illinois. Growing Home is an organization that trains homeless people in agriculture as part of a job-readiness program. Visitors will see more than 30 types of vegetables growing on a certified organic farm, permaculture plantings, beekeeping, vermiculture, and free-range poultry. The tour will also emphasize organic soil fertility methods, including cover cropping, under-sowing, rotation and succession planting, compost-making, and remineralization. For more information, visit www.growinghomeinc.org/.

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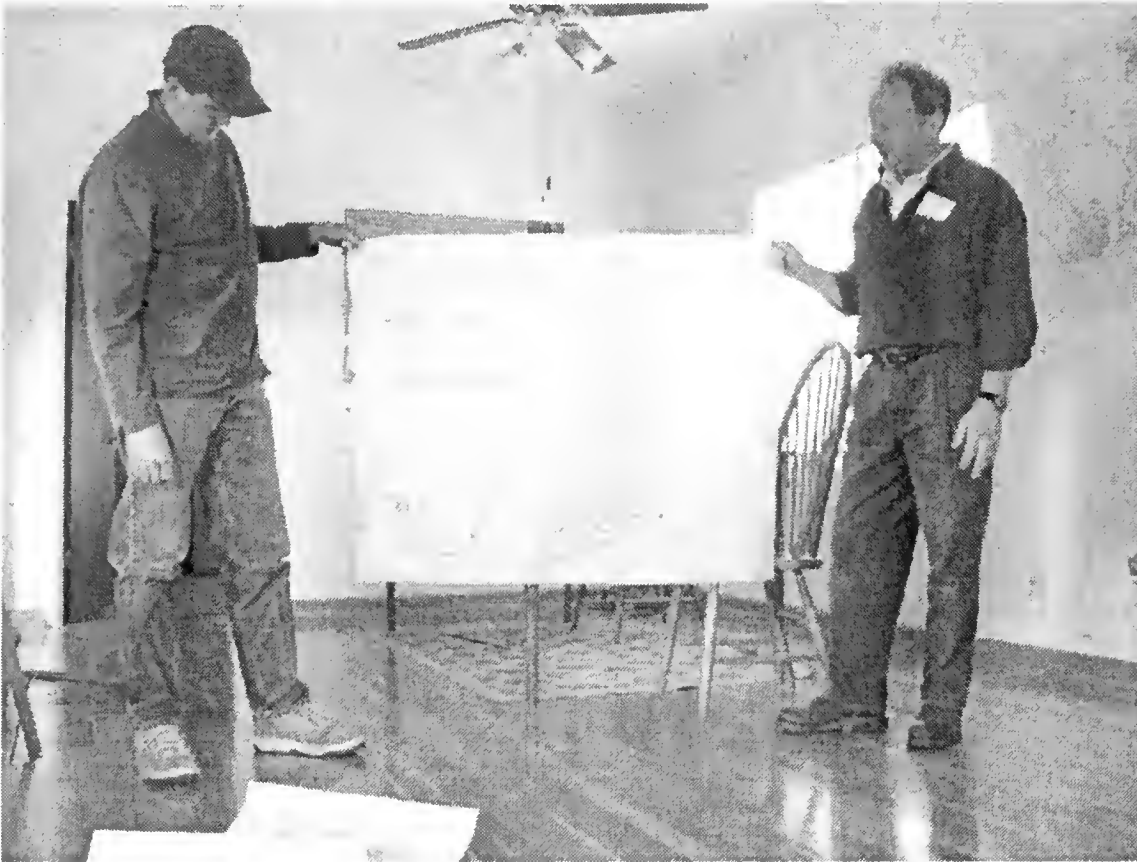


Photo by David Riecks

Dan Anderson and Bill Wilson, director of the Center for Sustainable Community in Stelle, Illinois, show a proposed plan for integrating a fish and plant ecosystem. Photo taken on one of the 2004 tours.

On Tuesday, July 19, a tour of QW Farms in Edgewood, Illinois, will focus on "On-Farm Composting." Issues about the topic will be presented in the morning, followed by a tour of a small-scale operation in the afternoon. Composting methods, regulations, marketing, and how composting fits into a nutrient management plan will be discussed. Illinois State University is a co-sponsor for this tour.

On Friday, August 12, the Lyons Fisheries Prawn Farm in Sandoval, Illinois, will host a look at "Illinois Farm-Raised Freshwater Prawns." Visitors will experience first-hand how such prawns are produced and see the hatchery, nursery, and grow-out ponds as well as live prawns on display.

The final tour of the season, "Marketing Opportunities for Agricultural Entrepreneurs," on Tuesday, September 13, will begin in Arthur, Illinois, at the Arthur Produce Auction Center. Participants will get to observe a produce auction in action, and both buyer and sellers will be on hand to answer questions. After lunch at Yoder's Kitchen, the tour will proceed to Condil's Great Pumpkin Patch for a look at one of central Illinois's best examples of agritourism. This tour is co-sponsored by the Central Illinois Farm Fresh Network.

Each tour costs \$15 per person. Registration at least one week in advance is required. Visit <http://www.aces.uiuc.edu/asap/topics/tours.html> to register; for more details about the tours, see the website or contact Deborah Cavanaugh-Grant (217-968-5512; cvnghgrn@uiuc.edu).

The tours are sponsored by the Agroecology/Sustainable Agriculture Program in the College of Agricultural, Consumer and Environmental Sciences at the University of Illinois, the North Central Region Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education (SARE) Professional Development Program, and the Illinois Small Farm Task Force.

"Illinois has a lot of creative farmers and entrepreneurs who are willing to open up their farms and businesses for a behind-the-scenes look."

Searching for a Hypoallergenic Soybean the Natural Way



One of thousands of packets of soybeans in the U of I germplasm collection.

by Debra Levey Larson

Searching for a soybean that doesn't contain the P34 protein, responsible for most of the allergic reactions in 6 to 8 percent of children who have allergies, was like looking for a needle in a haystack. But the needle has been found.

"After screening over 17,000 plant types from the USDA germplasm collection in Urbana, one confirmed P34 null line and approximately 91 lines with significantly reduced levels of P34 have been found," said Ted Hymowitz, a plant geneticist at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. There are about 5,000 more plant types to be tested, but the fact that one without the P34 protein has been found is encouraging.

Because soybeans are used in baby formula, a hypoallergenic soybean would help reduce the percentage of infants who have allergic responses to soy formula. An allergic response may include hives, itching, diarrhea and, in rare cases, anaphylactic shock. "The process we're using is looking for naturally occurring variants so there's no question about the safety of it. We're providing an alternate approach to genetically engineering for a P34 null line," Hymowitz said. Although a soybean without the P34 protein could be produced using biotechnology, concerns about the use of transgenic ingredients in baby food may make people worry.

After all of the plant types have been tested, the next step will be to transfer the trait that suppresses the P34 protein into a high-yielding, disease-resistant soybean cultivar. The first soybeans to be tested were those that are currently grown commercially. All contain the P34 protein.

Hymowitz noted that eliminating the P34 protein doesn't affect the nutritional content of the soybean.

The testing process is slow; only 100 plant types can be tested each day. "We're doing the qualitative analysis. Does it have the protein or doesn't it? It's a dominant protein, so it's rare to find ones that don't have it," said Hymowitz. "The ones we find with little or no P34 are sent to Eliot Herman's USDA lab at the Donald Danforth Plant Science Center in St. Louis, Missouri. They do the quantitative analysis."

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Ted Hymowitz and Leina Mary Joseph look through a binder of 11,000 tested samples.



Leina Mary Joseph prepares to test for the presence of the P34 protein in a soybean sample.

Leina Mary Joseph is in charge of the tedious task of testing the seeds using immunological procedures. "The Danforth lab uses a different technique to confirm that the result we got is accurate," said Joseph. "We found a null that doesn't have any of the P34 protein, and it has been confirmed by their lab. We are already growing some of the null and low P34 protein lines in the greenhouse, so we'll have a good supply of seeds when we need them."

The search for a hypoallergenic soybean is being led by Hymowitz, a nationally recognized soybean geneticist, and Herman, a molecular biologist with the USDA Agricultural Research Service and adjunct professor of plant science at the University of Missouri. Herman is located at the Danforth Center through a joint agreement between the center and USDA. Leina Mary Joseph (University of Illinois) is a co-investigator on the project.

Funding for the project is provided by the Illinois-Missouri Biotechnology Alliance, with a special grant from USDA.

For more information, contact Ted Hymowitz (217-333-9454; soyui@uiuc.edu) or Leina Mary Joseph (217-333-4256; lmjoseph@uiuc.edu).



Leina Mary Joseph selects another packet of seeds to test.

Cliff Schuette: Intensive Rotational Grazing

by Dan Anderson

"Mother Nature gives us a lot. We have to figure out how best to utilize it, and that's what we are failing to do here in the Midwest."



Cliff Schuette

Photo by Dan Anderson

Acres currently farmed: 570 acres

Crops and livestock currently raised: Beef (cow/calf, grazed), corn, soybeans, wheat and clover.

Formative events: Economics of conventional farming were not sustainable. Knew he had to do something different. Learned about intensive rotational grazing at U of I Extension meetings.

Approach to farming: Take what Mother Nature gives and utilize it efficiently. Intensive rotational grazing. Year-round grazing. Permanent pasture on all HEL ground and row-crop only the best land. Control what you can and remain flexible.

Some of Cliff Schuette's neighbors think Cliff is crazy. He lives in Clinton County, which, he says is the number one dairy county in the state. But those dairies are mostly confinement operations. The land is primarily used for corn and beans. You don't see much pasture in the area. Cliff has given his farm and farming practices a lot of thought, and he has found ways to use his resources more efficiently. To do that he is striving to graze his beef cattle herd year-round and make sure something is growing on every acre all the time.

Cliff grew up on the farm and wanted to stay in agriculture. He attended two years at Kaskaskia College before transferring to SIU in Carbondale. There he studied general agriculture. He did an internship with a chemical company, but about the time he was ready to graduate, the ag industry started downsizing. He interviewed at a couple places, but then had the opportunity to come back to the farm. He jumped at the chance.

For one year he did it the "normal" way. The pastures were grazed as whole fields. The cattle were turned out the first of May and left to graze till around Thanksgiving. He saw the writing on the wall, almost immediately. "The numbers weren't going to add up," Cliff says. That is when he started attending Extension meetings and learning about intensive rotational grazing. It seemed to make sense. Now, several years into the system, Cliff knows it works. "With this operation that I have here, if prices got as low as they've ever gotten, I would still make money."

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With mobile electric fencing, Schuette can control where the cattle graze and how long they graze before moving on to fresh grass.

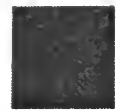
Cliff's farm currently consists of 220 acres of pasture. This he manages as an intensive, rotational grazing system, a system he learned from Ed Ballard (U of I Extension, Effingham) and Tom Saxe (U of I Extension, retired, Mt. Vernon). In addition to the beef on pasture, Cliff farms 350 acres of row-crop ground. Another 220 acres is cash-rented to neighbors. The area commands high prices and Cliff cannot use the land for pasture, because it doesn't connect with his other grazing land. There is quite a bit of other acreage on the farm in woods, creeks and wetlands. The landscape is rolling and mixed. The cattle contentedly grazing on the grass create a peaceful scene.

Since taking the farm, Cliff has put most of his highly erodible ground into permanent pasture and broken all the pastures into smaller paddocks. Now, with mobile electric fencing, he can control where the cattle graze and how long they graze before moving on to fresh grass. The goal is to keep the grass in the vegetative state, not letting it go to seed. At this stage the grass is more productive and nutritious. Cliff will cut and bale grass to stay ahead of it in the spring and early summer. Then he has stored forage to feed in August if things turn off really hot and dry. He can also use the stored forage to get him through the winter. All those paddocks have to have water and shade, so proper paddock design is important.

Much of the corn is used to feed out the cattle. What's not used is sold through conventional markets. Before the corn is harvested Cliff has a pasture mix of oats, rye and turnips flown on to the corn ground. When the corn is harvested, what remains is more good forage for the cattle to graze into the winter. That gives the grass a chance to recover. When the cattle have finished grazing the corn residue, there is a storehouse of grass that has accumulated from October through December. That grass can then be strip-grazed through much of the remaining winter. The following spring, Cliff spreads hog manure from a neighbor's farm on the grazed corn fields, turns it in and plants soybeans.

How does Cliff balance all this? "I always tell people, 'In the spring, plant your corn, cut your hay, then plant your soybeans.'" He points out that this approach will optimize all three crops. He also adds that with livestock there is just more work involved. "People in town have good jobs and free time. Farmers are getting drawn into that." Livestock, even on grass, is not going to be attractive to every producer.

Cliff markets his beef locally through a grocery chain owned by his cousins. When asked about marketing his beef as "grass-fed," Cliff explains, "If the consumer wanted it in this area I would not hesitate to sell grass-fed, but this area is not asking for it, so we're using the corn and corn by-products to feed the cattle out."



Cliff stays profitable by utilizing his land more efficiently. He's designed a system that allows him to be flexible with the weather. For example, the past few years corn has been cheap and the springtimes hot and dry. During these years he weaned his calves early and put them on corn. This year, the spring has been cool and wet, great for grass, so he's kept the calves with the cows on pasture. "Mother Nature gives us a lot. We have to figure out how best to utilize it, and that's what we are failing to do here in the Midwest." Another example of this on Cliff's farm is how he grazes the corn ground after harvest. "None of my land sits idle during the year. It's always got something growing on it."

Cliff has used the EQIP program to help him set up the system he now uses. He thinks there is a place for government to help agriculture, but not how it's currently set up. "The government should help us get set up to work efficiently and then leave us alone, don't come back in a couple years and bail us out. If we're set up right, we should be able to make money, even when prices are low."

"Concentrate on what you have control of," Cliff says. "Get set up to work efficiently. Farmers should be able to make money, even in the low years." 🌾

This feature on Cliff Schuette is a chapter from the book A Different Field, by Dan Anderson. Single copies can be purchased for \$6.50 plus shipping, or five copies for \$20 plus shipping. To order, visit www.PublicationsPlus.uiuc.edu, or call 1-800-345-6087. Anderson is a research specialist in the College of Agricultural, Consumer and Environmental Sciences at the University of Illinois (217-333-1588; aslan@uiuc.edu).



2005 Conference of the American Forage and Grassland Council

June 11-15
Radisson Hotel
Bloomington, Illinois

Register online at www.afgc.org or contact the AFGC headquarters (1-800-944-2342; dtucker@io.com).
A PDF brochure listing the full schedule of tours and sessions is available at the website.



North Central Region

SARE

NCR SARE UPDATE


by Gerry Walter

The NCR SARE Producer Grant Program will have a new name and a new calendar as a result of action taken at the NCR-SARE administrative council's November meeting in Nebraska City, Nebraska. The program soon will have a new coordinator as well, once NCR-SARE chooses a replacement for retiring program coordinator Ken Schneider.

The Farmer-Rancher Grant Program, a name the council felt better reflects the occupations of participants across the entire North Central Region, will continue to award competitive grants (up to \$6,000 for individual projects and \$10,000 for group projects) to support farmer, rancher, and grower-managed sustainable agriculture research projects. However, this year's call for proposals will be postponed until late summer or early fall.

The council also moved up key dates for future program years, shortening the time between the initial call for proposals and when funds become available to grantees. The 2006 call for proposals is planned for December 2005, with grant recipients to be notified the following April.

The council also began planning for the 2006 National SARE Conference, to be held August 15–17 at the Olympia Resort and Conference Center in Oconomowoc, Wisconsin, 30 miles west of Milwaukee. This event will showcase successful projects from across the North Central Region and bring together farmers, researchers, community food system organizers, and other agricultural professionals for a variety of demonstrations, tours, and idea-sharing sessions. The biennial national conference rotates among the four SARE regions, with the Northeast Region hosting the 2004 event in Burlington, Vermont.

Gerry Walter (217-333-9429; gwalter@uiuc.edu) is an undergraduate advising coordinator in the Department of Human and Community Development at the University of Illinois and a state representative to the NCR SARE administrative council. 

2004 AND 2005 MINI-GRANT RECIPIENTS

A mini-grant program funded by the USDA-NCR-SARE Professional Development Program has been developed to provide resources to educators to develop and deliver programs and activities that enhance the sustainability of rural and urban communities and the food and agricultural system. Eligible applicants include personnel from Extension, the Natural Resources Conservation Service, other governmental agencies, nongovernmental organizations, and nonprofit and for-profit sectors serving the food and fiber system.

The University of Illinois was given \$12,000 for mini-grants for 2005, which have been awarded for the projects listed below. (The projects funded for 2004 are also listed for your review.) The supported projects seek to implement community activities, production practices, or financial planning or stewardship activities that improve the viability of Illinois agriculture and communities.

For more information, contact Deborah Cavanaugh-Grant (217-968-5512; cvnghgrn@uiuc.edu).

2005 MINI-GRANT RECIPIENTS

Locally Grown/Locally Good Festival
(Carrie Edgar, Adams–Brown Counties Extension Unit)

Advancing Alternative Agriculture in Fulton County: Phase 2
(Rhonda Ferree, Fulton County Extension)

Planting Seeds, Feeding Minds and Cultivating Healthy Choices
(Jennifer Fishburn, Sangamon–Menard Counties Extension Unit)

On-Farm Composting Workshop
(Duane Friend, Springfield Extension Center)

"Growing Together" Community Garden
(Kasey Murphy, McHenry County Extension)

Western Illinois Grazing and Livestock Symposium
(Dean Oswald, Macomb Extension Center)

From Seed to Store
(Debra Ruff, Livingston County Soil and Water Conservation District)

Organic Gardening to Sustainable Agriculture: An Introduction for Urban and Suburban Educators
(Steve Tiwald, Green Earth Institute)

Chicago Fresh and Home Grown
(Carol Williams, John Marshall Agriculture/Horticulture Academy)

2004 AND 2005 MINI-GRANT RECIPIENTS

The Effect of Small Grain Cover Crops
(Jim Morrison, Rockford Extension Center)

Share Your Knowledge and Harvest
(Linda Fitzgerald, Kendall County Extension)

Lake Katherine Heritage Gardens Interpretive Signs and Brochures
(Nancy Pollard, Cook County/South Suburban Extension Unit)

2004 MINI-GRANT RECIPIENTS

Montgomery County: Encouraging Small-Scale Agriculture Enterprises
(Kelli Bassett, Montgomery County Extension)

Locally Grown Kids: A Farm-to-School Nutrition Education Program
(Brenda Derrick, Adams-Brown Counties Extension Unit)

Alternative Agriculture in Fulton County
(Rhonda Ferree, Fulton County)

Feed People a Vegetable and They Eat Today, Teach Them How to Grow a
Vegetable and They Can Eat a Lifetime
(Linda Fitzgerald and Camille Hanslik, Kendall County Extension)

On-Farm Composting Workshop
(Duane Friend, Springfield Extension Center)

The U of I Chicago Extension Unit and Chicago Fresh Urban Agricultural Town
Meeting
(Rhonda Hardy, Chicago South Extension Unit)

Introducing the Public to the Nutritional Value and Availability of Locally Grown
Produce, Both Organic and Non-Organic, as Well as Pasture-Raised Beef and
Chicken at the Kankakee County Farmers Market
(Merrill Marxman, USDA Farm Service Agency, Kankakee County Extension)

Pumpkin Production and Development of an After-School Sustainable Agricul-
ture Program: The Great Pumpkin Gang
(Karen Plaster, Prairie Crossing Charter School)

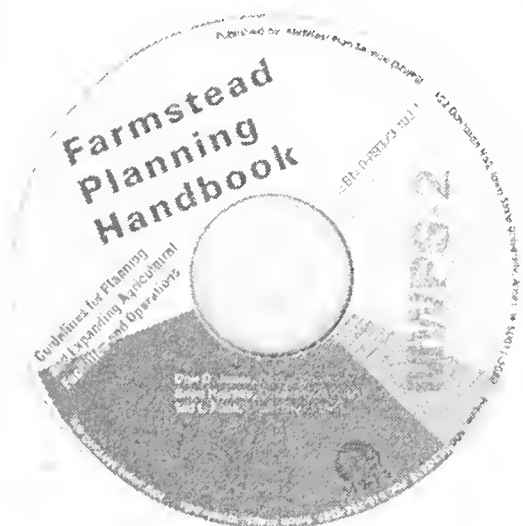
Investigate Illinois Agriculture,
(Kelly Pool, Pike County Extension)

Locally Grown Locally Good, Connecting the Producer to the School
(Mike Roegge, Adams-Brown Counties Extension Unit)



RESOURCES

Guidance for Farmstead Planning



Farmstead Planning Handbook: Guidelines for Planning and Expanding Agricultural Facilities and Operations, a new CD-ROM from Midwest Plan Service, provides a step-by-step full-color guide to farmstead planning, from concept to construction. The CD, which runs on both PC and Macintosh computers, explains and shows how to locate, plan, and build or expand an agricultural site—from small acreage to a large operation. It also considers relevant related issues such as odor and dust control. More than 100 drawings, photographs, and diagrams plus tables, bulleted lists, and an expansion plan example clarify and enhance the written descriptions.

The CD-ROM is written by Don D. Jones of Purdue University, Brian Holmes of the University of Wisconsin, and Ted L. Funk of the University of Illinois. It is available from MWPS for \$20 plus shipping and handling. Volume discounts are available.

Order online at www.mwpsHQ.org, by email at mwps@iastate.edu, by phone at 800-562-3618 or 515-294-4337, by fax at 515-294-9589, or by writing Midwest Plan Service, 122 Davidson Hall, Iowa State University, Ames, IA 50011-3080.

RESOURCES

New Agriculture Network

The University of Illinois, Iowa State University, Michigan State University, and Purdue University are combining resources to bring seasonal advice online to field crop and vegetable growers interested in organic agriculture. The site serves those interested in transitioning to organic as well as those currently practicing low-input or organic agriculture.

For more information, visit www.ipm.msu.edu/new-ag.htm.

Federal Assistance for Rural Concerns

Searching for federal funding or agricultural expertise? You'll find many answers in *Building Better Rural Places*, a newly revised 160-page guide to 82 federal programs offering assistance in agriculture, forestry, conservation, and rural community development. Download the entire publication or view ordering information at <http://www.sare.org/publications/ruralplaces.htm>.

Proposal Workshops

The Michael Fields Agricultural Institute (MFAI) offers workshops to help readers develop sound projects, identify programs, and maximize their chances of submitting successful proposals. For more information, contact Margaret Krome, MFAI agricultural policy coordinator (608-238-1440; mkrome@inxpress.net).



CALENDAR

June 11–15

American Forage and Grassland Council Conference
Bloomington, Illinois

<http://www.illinoisforage.org/>

<http://www.afgc.org/>

June 16–17

National Value-Added Ag Conference
Adams Mark Hotel • Indianapolis, Indiana

Visit <http://www.aces.uiuc.edu/asap/news/newspersp.html> to see a list of proposed topics. For more information, contact Jane E. Anderson (765-496-3099; jane1@purdue.edu).

July 30–August 4

Environmental Management Conference
Soil and Water Conservation Society
Hyatt Regency and Riverside Convention Center
Rochester, New York

The Soil and Water Conservation Society annual conference will offer valuable natural resource conservation information in a combination of workshops, plenary and concurrent sessions, and educational tours. Come to network and share your accomplishments. The conference will address how conservation of natural resources is linked to local, regional, national, and global concerns, with four specific topic areas:

Managing Landscapes for Environmental Quality
Assessing and Communicating the Effectiveness of Conservation and Environmental Programs
The Growing Debate Around Water Use
Consumer Demand and Policy Effects on Agricultural Resources

A preliminary program with registration information is available on the SWCS website: http://www.swcs.org/t_what2005confhomepage.htm.

July 31–August 2

Association of Illinois Soil and Water Conservation Districts Annual Meeting
Illinois Department of Agriculture Conference
Holiday Inn Select • Decatur, Illinois
<http://www.aiswcd.org>

September 13–15

"It's the Water" Workshop

West North Central Region Soil and Water Conservation Society

Quality Inn • Hannibal, Missouri

"It's the Water" will provide people working on water-quality issues tools they can use to be more effective in their efforts.

The audience is expected to represent both public- and private-sector individuals who provide direct assistance to agricultural producers and to those involved in policy and program evaluation and development. The mix of presentations is expected to be about 2/3 technical, 1/3 policy/program evaluation. Attendees will tour manufacturing facilities that are using practices to improve water quality. Speakers will be invited based on identified topics as well as a call for papers.

The WNC Region SWCS comprises Illinois, Iowa, Missouri, Minnesota, and Wisconsin. For more information about the agenda and registration for "It's the Water," contact your local chapter of the Soil and Water Conservation Society.

October 17–20

"Creating Opportunities for Small Farmers and Ranchers"
National Small Farm Conference

Sheraton Hotel
Greensboro, North Carolina

Co-hosted by North Carolina A&T State University and North Carolina State University, the 4th National Small Farm Conference will focus on niche-marketing success stories from different regions of the country that have helped small farmers and ranchers and have the potential of being replicated elsewhere. Resources, workshops, tools, and tours will also promote opportunities for enhancing farm income.

The small-farm conferences, which attract upwards of 600 participants, provide a venue for small-farm program leaders from federal, state, and local organizations to learn about successful programs that help small producers enhance incomes to levels comparable to other economic sectors. Programs with the potential to be replicated elsewhere in the nation are emphasized. Each conference is held in a different geographical region to promote diversity of attendance. The conferences are organized primarily by CSREES in conjunction with other USDA agencies, other U.S. agencies, land-grant institutions, and several foundations.

For more information, visit

http://www.csrees.usda.gov/nea/ag_systems/in_focus/smallfarms_if_conferences.



2005 SUSTAINABLE AG TOURS AT A GLANCE

Mark your calendar and plan to attend one or all of this year's tours. See page 3 for more information.

May 25

A Closer Look at Sustainability
Center for Sustainable Community
Stelle, Illinois

June 23

Organics from Seed to Table
University of Illinois South Farms and
Blue Moon Farm
Urbana, Illinois

July 13

Organic Vegetables, Greens and Herbs Grown in
Intensive Beds
Growing Home Farm
Marseilles, Illinois

July 19

On-Farm Composting
QW Farms
Edgewood, Illinois

August 12

Illinois Farm-Raised Freshwater Prawns
Lyons Fisheries Prawn Farm
Sandoval, Illinois

September 13

Marketing Opportunities for Agricultural Entrepreneurs
Arthur Produce Auction Center and Condil's
Great Pumpkin Patch
Arthur, Illinois

AGRO-ECOLOGY 

News and Perspectives

University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign
College of Agricultural, Consumer and Environmental Sciences
W-503 Turner Hall, MC-047
1102 S. Goodwin Ave.
Urbana, Illinois 61801



Until organic certification takes root, consumers rely on reputation

by Emily Parrino

California suppliers have served Jaimi Lambert well. Last winter, the Strawberry Fields produce manager enjoyed a steady flow of certified organic fruits and vegetables from the west coast to stock her store in Urbana, Illinois.

"It's easier in the wintertime," she said. "I know what I'm going to get and when I'm going to get it."

And the USDA certification, a requirement since 2002 for all foods labeled organic, tells Lambert that what she bought is grown without chemicals or genetic modification—a top priority for the 29-year-old buyer.

But Lambert won't be wooed by California's corporate farms for long. Already, a few local tubers, including sunchokes and golden beets, have appeared on the store's shelves. As soon as growing conditions permit a reliable supply, she plans to use as many local farmers as possible.

"What I like about it is I might be helping them—you know, the little guy versus the big guy," she said. "It's supporting your community."

Being committed to both local farms and organic produce can pose a problem for Lambert and other earth-conscious consumers, because many local farms do not have organic certification. For Lambert, it's the face-to-face interactions with these local farmers that win her seal of approval.

"The first thing we look for is, How do they grow it? What do they use to keep the bugs off?" she explained. "We ask them about their methods, and just kind of get a feel for them as a person."

"Honesty, trustworthiness and a pride in their produce, and a love for what they're doing. Those are the most important things to me."

A local farmer's methods and motives are important to many of the store's shoppers, who look for natural foods that are pure, tasty and kind to the environment. Strawberry Fields shopper Naeem Sheikh said he trusts a farm's reputation more than the USDA organic labels that dot certified foods. "I've heard the USDA is now using a lot of relaxation with organic standards," said Sheikh. "Over time it's going to lose its meaning."

SUMMER 2005

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Agro-Ecology News and Perspectives is published by the College of Agricultural, Consumer and Environmental Sciences, Agroecology/Sustainable Agriculture Program, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign (UIUC). This newsletter is designed to inform its readers about the well being of human and natural communities through the adaption of agricultural practices and farming systems that are economically viable, environmentally sound, and socially just. This issue was edited by Deborah Cavanaugh-Grant and Debra Levey Larson, designed by Scherer Communications and produced by Roberts Design Company. Copy editing by Molly Bentsen. Photos not credited in this issue were taken by Debra Levey Larson.

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College of Agricultural,
Consumer and
Environmental Sciences

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If you would like to receive future issues of Agro-Ecology News and Perspectives, contact Deborah Cavanaugh-Grant (217-968-5512; cvnghgrn@uiuc.edu).



Cathy Essien and her daughter Niara live in Champaign but frequently drive across town to shop at Strawberry Fields.

Teresa Brennan-Pomatto, a member of the Common Grounds Food Co-op in Champaign, said she wants to know exactly what goes into the food she feeds her family. "I like to know what 'certified organic' means, and what 'sort of organic' means," she said. "And then I base my decision on that." Both Sheikh and Brennan-Pomatto buy foods that are not certified, but they take the time to understand the farmer's methods before they buy.

The co-op sells eggs from three different farms. The eggs aren't certified organic, but a detailed description of each farm's practices adorns the door to the refrigerator case. Brennan-Pomatto pointed to one of the signs. "I get her eggs," she said of one farmer. "I know her, so I know I can trust her."

Customer loyalty and recognition lets farmers like Henry Brockman be successful with or without certification. Brockman, who lives in Congerville, Illinois, sells his popular produce at the Evanston Farmers Market. He was certified organic from 1993 to 1999, before it was required, because he wanted to show his customers he was serious about organic.

To be certified, farmers must create an organic plan detailing how they will use accepted organic products and practices to keep bugs and weeds at bay. Farmers submit the plan to an accredited certifier, keep thorough records of their practices, and undergo annual inspections. The certifier reviews the inspector's report as well as the farmer's plan before issuing the farmer an organic certificate.

Brockman said the process kept him accountable to high standards, but his customers did not really notice. "In my 13 years now, I've only been asked twice if I was certified," he said.

Brockman has not changed his methods, but he decided not to pursue certification in 2000. The new rules seemed confusing and the paperwork daunting, said Brockman, who is not alone in resisting organic certification.

For 20 years, Bob Brackett has kept what he calls "a very large garden." On just two acres, Brackett raises over 40 varieties of fruits and vegetables to sell at the farmers market in Urbana.



Katy Guin carries a freshly baked tray of chocolate chip chai muffins made with organic flour.

With the exception of growing onions and potatoes started at conventional farms, Brackett said his practices conform to the national organic standards. But the time commitment and fear of the unknown have prevented him from pursuing certification. "I've heard horror stories of additional paperwork," he said. "I don't know what else is involved, and I'm somewhat trepid about finding out."

After farming commercially for two decades, Brackett said his long-time customers do not question him about certification. However, Brackett is faced with the question of what to call his produce. The word "organic" is off-limits to farmers without certification. For those who sell more than \$5,000 of produce, using the O-word can reap a hefty \$10,000 fine.

Both Brackett and Brockman have struggled to find a way to describe and market their produce. "Sustainable" and "ecologically sound" sounded unappetizing to Brackett, while "natural" was too vague. Brockman invented a new but unsatisfying term to get around the rule.

"For a while I called myself 'more-ganic.' But I don't know, it seemed too cute," he said. "We already have a word in the dictionary—why do we have to make up a new one?"

Lisa Haynes, owner of Tomahnous Farm, also wanted to keep the term "organic." "I didn't want to give that up," she said. "I felt like if I didn't use the term, people might construe that as I've done something different than I've always done."

Haynes, who raises produce and livestock, received certification in 2004. She owes her decision in part to friend and fellow certified farmer Jon Cherniss, who views certification as a way to keep the meaning of organic in the hands of small growers.

"When you're certified you stay in touch with the debate," he explained. "It's important that the word 'organic' means something, rather than just having big business and the government making the decision."

Like many other small farmers, Cherniss said his customers already trust him. "It's not for my marketing reasons that I'm certified," he said. "Hopefully by be-



Strawberry Fields produce manager Jaimi Lambert adds packages of shiitake mushrooms to the produce case. Lambert converted the produce department at Strawberry Fields to all organic because half conventional and half organic was confusing to customers.

ing certified it's going to keep me actively involved. I get a chance to formulate what organic means."

Cherniss and Haynes believe that the benefits of certification outweigh the cost. But in Champaign County, they are the minority. Cissy Bowman, president and CEO of Indiana Certified Organics (ICO), said misconceptions keep others from getting certified.

Haynes can now laugh at the fears she had going into her first inspection. "The first time, I was nervous. My barn was a mess. And there were all these weeds," she said. "It was like having a formal dinner party; I wanted everything to be perfect."

But certification is not as tricky as it seems, said Bowman, who is also a farmer. "You don't get denied certification because you have too many weeds," she said with a sigh. "All you need to do is meet the land requirements, so that's three years away from pesticides and chemicals. It's not that hard."

Debunking certification myths has kept Bowman busy. "I had to tell farmers that they could still grow on the land during that three-year period. It's not that you have to take your land out of production for three years. That's called 'Let's just go bankrupt!'" she said, laughing.

Bowman said that another hang-up, the 12 pages of paperwork, is about as unpleasant but necessary as doing taxes. "There's organic farmers, and there's good organic farmers. Good farmers keep records. It shows them their mistakes," she said.

Some farmers fear that unintentional mistakes will cause them to fail the annual organic inspections. But Bowman said those fears are unwarranted as well. Last year ICO certified all 276 farms that applied, including 90 in Illinois. "People think you make a mistake and someone's standing over you with a cattle prod," she quipped. "It's not like that."



Exterior of Strawberry Fields in Urbana.

Instead, an initial inspection tells farmers about any noncompliance and allows them to withdraw their application and fix the problem before applying again. The process gives well-intentioned farmers the benefit of the doubt in the event of a violation that is beyond their control, like flooding from a nearby conventional farm. But it also makes it difficult to prosecute farmers for deliberate violations.

Certification was designed to prevent blatant deception and regulate the use of the word organic. But the USDA lacks an organic police. So it's up to farmers and consumers to blow the whistle on organic fraud. "I see it at the market all the time," said Brockman, "where they say they don't spray or it's all natural and it's not true."

Haynes remembers being in awe of a sign that read "organic cucumbers" at another farmer's stall one year. In Illinois it's difficult, if not impossible, to prevent squash vine borers from munching organic cucumbers to the ground, she said.

"When I asked them how they did it, they said, 'Oh, we use Sevin,'" Haynes said. "That's a chemical pesticide, which is clearly not organic."

Unscrupulous farmers who market conventional produce as organic might be able to cheat the system for a little while. But they'll have a tough time passing the face-to-face test with Strawberry Fields' Jaimi Lambert, who is vigilant against organic fraud.

"I can just tell," Lambert said, nodding her head slowly. "Whether it's a gut feeling or it's intuition, if you go over it with people and look at their product, you can tell." Lambert has occasionally dealt with farmers who seemed more interested in organic premiums than principles. She lets them know she's not interested.

Emily Parrino is a graduate student in journalism at the University of Illinois (217-356-0604; eparrin2@uiuc.edu).



Getting Started in Farming

by Deborah Cavanaugh-Grant



Heirloom vegetable garden at Spence Farm in Fairbury. Marty and Kris Travis are Farm Beginnings steering committee members.

Are you interested in farming, but don't know where to start? Or are you a farmer wanting to learn more about incorporating alternative enterprises into your operation? If so, you may be interested in a unique program—Farm Beginnings — that will be starting this fall. This hands-on program trains new and transitioning farmers in innovative, low-cost farming practices that sustain both farm families and the land. Farm Beginnings will let you tap the knowledge of some of the Midwest's most innovative and skilled farmers; develop lifelong friendships and networks with other beginning farmers; learn critical management skills; engage in an internship, employment, or mentorship with an experienced farmer; and craft a tailor-made farming/business plan.

The 10-month course, taught by both established farmers and experienced Extension and other professionals, includes classroom sessions from October through February, a field-based component where you will be able to visit and learn from unique and diverse farming operations, and a farmer-to-farmer mentorship. Farm Beginnings training addresses sustainable production, family goal setting,

business planning and management, and marketing practices, and it creates an opportunity for participants to network with established, sustainable farmers.

The program, initiated in Minnesota almost ten years ago, is a collaboration between a group of farmers and The Land Stewardship Project, a nonprofit organization dedicated to sustainable agriculture (www.landstewardshipproject.org). In 2004, the Land Stewardship Project received a grant from USDA-SARE North Central Region Professional Development Program (www.sare.org/ncrsare) to pilot Farm Beginnings in Illinois, Missouri and



Marty Travis of Spence Farm in Fairbury checks one of his bee hives. For more about the Spence Farm, visit www.thespencefarm.com.

TRAINING SCHEDULE

All sessions are conducted at the McLean County Unit Office,
402 N. Hershey Rd., Bloomington, Illinois



Brent Scherr from Green Leaf Naturals Farm in Fairbury checks his kale crop after gathering eggs.

Nebraska. In Illinois, we will have two pilot programs, one in central Illinois (Central Illinois Farm Beginnings) and the other in northern Illinois and southern Wisconsin (Stateline Farm Beginnings Program).

Each of the Farm Beginnings groups has a farmer-dominated steering committee to provide guidance and vision for the program. Stateline Farm Beginnings is a project of the Collaborative



Pasture raised laying hens at Green Leaf Naturals Farm in Fairbury.

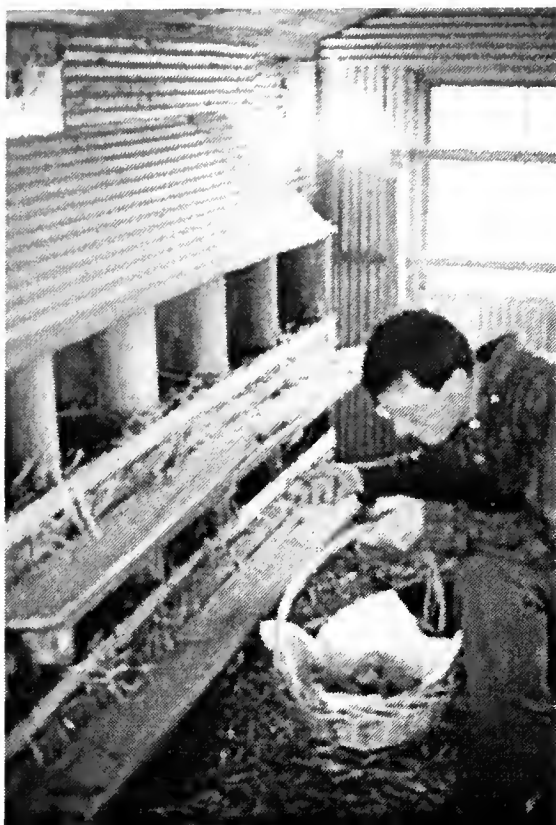
- SESSION 1:** Saturday, October 22, 10:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m.
Building Networks, Value Clarification and Goal Setting
Presenters: Laura Paine, Columbia County Extension, Portage, WI; Deborah Cavanaugh-Grant, University of Illinois
- SESSION 2:** Saturday, November 5, 10:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m.
Whole Farm Planning
Presenters: Laura Paine; Bruce Condill, The Great Pumpkin Patch, Arthur
- SESSION 3:** Thursday, November 17, 6:30 to 9:30 p.m.
Plan for Profit
Presenter: Allen Williams, Ridgeline Farm, Inc., Cerro Gordo
- SESSION 4:** Thursday, December 1, 6:30 to 9:30 p.m.
Creating the Plan—Nuts and Bolts
Presenters: Dave Cleverdon, Kinnikinnick Farm; Ruth Hambleton, U of I Extension, Mt. Vernon
- SESSION 5:** Thursday, December 15, 6:30 to 9:30 p.m.
Building Your Business Plan
Presenters: Ken Klotz, Bradley University, Peoria; Leslie Cooperband and Wes Jarrell, Prairie Fruits Farm, Champaign; Pat and John Sondgeroth, Heartland Meats, Mendota
- SESSION 6:** Thursday, January 5, 6:30 to 9:30 p.m.
Marketing 101—Intro to Marketing
Presenter: Terra Brockman, The Land Connection, Congerville; Andy Larson, U of I; Rich Schell, attorney
- SESSION 7:** Thursday, January 19, 6:30 to 9:30 p.m.
Marketing 201—Realities from the Field
Panelists: Larry and Marilyn Wettstein, Organic Pastures, Eureka; Henry Brockman, Henry's Farm, Congerville; Marty and Kris Travis, Spence Farm, Fairbury; Stan Schutte, Triple S Farms, Stewardson; Jon Cherniss, Blue Moon Farm, Urbana
- SESSION 8:** Thursday, February 2, 6:30 to 9:30 p.m.
Connecting with Resources and Class Presentations
Presenters: Greg Peterson, Farm Credit Services, Champaign; Scott Davis, Pekin National Bank, Pekin; Ivan Dozier, USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service
- SESSION 9:** Thursday, February 16, 6:30 to 9:30 p.m.
Connecting with Resources, Class Presentations, and Identifying the Next Steps
Facilitator: Deborah Cavanaugh-Grant
Presenters: Terra Brockman; Elaine Sebald, Downtown Bloomington Farmers' Market.

[Make-up snow day if needed: Thursday, March 2, 6:30 to 9:30 p.m.]

- SESSION 10:** March 16, 6:00 to 9:30 p.m. (includes dinner)
Mentor/Mentee Meeting

APRIL TO SEPTEMBER 2006

On-Farm Education: one-on-one mentoring and farm tours



Brent Scherr collects eggs from his pasture raised hens at Green Leaf Naturals Farm



Marty and Kris Travis work their salad greens at Spence Farm in Fairbury.

FARM BEGINNINGS STEERING COMMITTEE MEMBERS

Henry Brockman, Henry's Farm
 Jack Erisman, Goldmine Farms
 Scott Davis, Pekin National Bank
 Colin Riley
 Teresa Santiago
 Stan Schutte, Triple S Farms
 Steve Schwoerer, University of Illinois
 Kris and Marty Travis, Spence Farm
 Dennis Wettstein,
 Wettstein's Organic Farm
 Marilyn Wettstein, Organic Pastures
 Harold Wilken, Janies Farm

FARM BEGINNINGS FACILITATORS

Terra Brockman,
 The Land Connection
 Deborah Cavanaugh-Grant,
 University of Illinois
 Leslie Cooperband,
 University of Illinois

Regional Alliance for Farmer Training (CRAFT; www.csalearningcenter.org/craft.html) and partners with the Churches' Center for Land and People (www.op.org/cclp), Prairie Crossing (www.prairiecrossing.com) and Heifer International (www.heifer.org). Central Illinois Farm Beginnings is a collaborative effort of The Land Connection (www.thelandconnection.org), the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign (www.uiuc.edu) and University of Illinois Extension (www.extension.uiuc.edu).

In its ninth year in Minnesota, Farm Beginnings has trained 225 people, over 60% of whom are farming currently. Graduates are farming over 6,000 acres engaging in enterprises covering a diverse spectrum: dairy (cow and goat), beef, hogs, meat goats, sheep, poultry, wholesale vegetables, community supported agriculture (CSA), organic grains and specialty products such as flowers. It is hoped that Farm Beginnings will provide similar results for Illinois and Wisconsin.

For more information or to sign up: Stateline Farm Beginnings, Parker Forsell, CSA Learning Center at Angelic Organics, 815-389-8455, CRAFT@CSALearningCenter.org; Central Illinois Farm Beginnings, Deborah Cavanaugh-Grant, 217-968-5512, cvnghgrn@uiuc.edu.

Photos in this article were taken by Sarah Hultine.



Visitors to Spence Farm in Fairbury had the opportunity to dig wild leeks (also called ramps) that grow naturally in the woodland areas. Marty and Kris Travis, co-owners of Spence Farm, harvest the wild leeks beginning in April or early May, clean them, package them and sell them to restaurants in Chicago, Champaign-Urbana and in cities in Oregon and Michigan.

Farm Progress Show

Scheduled for Late August in Illinois

Beginning this year, Decatur, Illinois, will host the Farm Progress Show in odd-numbered years. (The show will be held in Iowa in even-numbered years.) Known as the "Superbowl of Agriculture" and "The World's Fair of Agriculture," the event will bring a quarter million people and the world of production agriculture to America's agribusiness capital.

The Farm Progress Show will observe its 52nd anniversary on August 30, 31, and Sept. 1. The show, one of a number of farm shows in the U.S., is a service of Farm Progress Companies, which publishes nearly two dozen state-oriented agricultural magazines, including *Prairie Farmer*. Traditionally, the Farm Progress Show rotated among Iowa, Illinois, and Indiana, but the biannual event in Decatur will become the show for Illinois and Indiana.

Decatur is building "Progress City," an all-weather exhibition park, on the northeast corner of the city, adjacent to Richland Community College. The infrastructure will include paved streets, subsurface drainage, permanent restrooms, city water, and underground electric service. Over 200 acres of sod fields will be tilled to ensure adequate parking for daily vehicular traffic and up to 700 motorhomes occupied by multiple-day visitors.

The site is being developed on approximately 640 acres, owned in part by Richland Community College (RCC), Archer Daniels Midland (ADM), and the Boyd and Hebel farming families, whose fields will be used for crop harvesting and tillage demonstrations. The RCC and ADM property will be used for the exhibit field, as well as for parking and a public concert venue.

\$200,000 Grants Available to Illinois Specialty Growers

Specialty Crops Grants are available through the Governor's Opportunity Returns program to help those who work on small to medium size farms promote and market their Illinois grown produce.

Applications are due October 14. A maximum grant award of \$25,000 can be accessed through this program. For more information on Specialty Crops Grants or to obtain an application, call Kim Janssen at the Illinois Department of Agriculture at 217-785-5848.

The infrastructure will be complete in time for the 2005 show, which is already 95% booked. Since that level of exhibitor registration is four months earlier than usual, two more permanent streets will be added to Progress City for 2007. It is expected that over time, show management and many exhibitors will erect permanent structures for use during the Farm Progress Show and other events.

Purdue University and the University of Illinois will collaborate to bring research specialists and Extension educators for an extensive program of seminars on agronomic, marketing, farm management, family and youth issues. The seminars will be held in the comfort of adjacent RCC classrooms. Dozens of local and state agencies are also collaborating on a rural health initiative, which will provide free health screenings and checkups for attendees.

A youth program, coordinated by the Decatur Park District, will be available to families with elementary school-aged youngsters who come with their parents but don't necessarily want to see the show.

As the show approaches, be sure to visit two websites that will provide updated information: web.extension.uiuc.edu/macon/farmprogress and www.farmprogressshow.com.

See the back cover of this newsletter for information on special seminars being offered during the Farm Progress Show.

SECOND YEAR OF THE NEW AGRICULTURE NETWORK

Four universities -- University of Illinois, Michigan State University, Purdue University and Iowa State University -- have joined resources to bring seasonal advice to field crop and vegetable growers interested in organic agriculture. New information is posted to the website twice a month during the growing season and less frequently during winter. The online newsletter features crop updates from organic growers and articles from university specialists about a variety of practices and new findings useful for organic growers. The information serves those interested in transitioning to organic as well as those currently practicing low-input or organic agriculture.

Visit <http://www.ipm.msu.edu/new-ag.htm>

Sustainable Agriculture Tours

Organic Vegetables, Greens and Herbs Grown in Intensive Beds

Wednesday, July 13

Growing Home Farm, Marseilles, Illinois

Growing Home is an organization that trains homeless people in agricultural methods as part of a job-readiness program. Visitors will see more than 30 types of vegetables growing on a certified organic farm, permaculture plantings, bee-keeping, vermiculture and free-range poultry. Tours will also emphasize organic soil fertility methods, including cover cropping, under-sowing, rotation and succession planting, compost-making and remineralization. For more information on the organization's mission, visit www.growinghomeinc.org/.

On-Farm Composting

Tuesday, July 19

QW Farms, Edgewood, Illinois

Issues about on-farm composting will be addressed in the morning, followed by a tour of a small-scale on-farm composting operation in the afternoon. Composting methods, regulations, marketing and how composting fits into a nutrient management plan will be discussed. Illinois State University is a co-sponsor for this tour.

Illinois Farm-raised Freshwater Prawns

Friday, August 12

Lyons Fisheries Prawn Farm, Sandoval, Illinois

Visitors will experience first-hand how farm-raised freshwater prawns are produced. The tour will include the hatchery, nursery and grow-out ponds as well as live prawns on display.

Marketing Opportunities for Agricultural Entrepreneurs

Tuesday, September 13

Arthur Produce Auction Center and Condil's Great Pumpkin Patch,
Arthur, Illinois

At the auction center visitors will observe a produce auction in action, with both buyers and sellers on hand to answer questions. After lunch at Yoder's Kitchen, the tour will proceed to Condil's Great Pumpkin Patch, one of central Illinois' best examples of agritourism. This tour is co-sponsored by the Illinois Farm Fresh Network.

Each tour costs \$15 per person. Registration at least one week in advance is required. Visit <http://www.aces.uiuc.edu/asap/topics/tours.html> to register and for more details about the tours, or contact Deborah Cavanaugh-Grant (217-968-5512; cvnghgrn@uiuc.edu).

The tours are sponsored by the Agroecology/Sustainable Agriculture Program in the College of Agricultural, Consumer and Environmental Sciences at the University of Illinois, the North Central Region Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education (SARE) Professional Development Program and the Illinois Small Farm Task Force.

July 29–31, September 14–25

Permaculture Workshops
Anna, Illinois

The Permaculture Project, in partnership with Dayemi Tariqat, is offering 3-day and 12-day workshops.

The 3-day workshop will present information on basic permaculture methodologies and ethics; creating edible, medicinal, culinary and utility landscapes and food forests; land restoration; long-term food preservation; locating vendor and information services; designing basic renewable energy systems and more.

The \$275 cost includes meals, camping and workshop materials. Hotel accommodations can be arranged if preferred. The day rate is \$125.

The 12-day workshop is a permaculture design certification course that includes classroom lectures, observation exercises and hands-on projects based on seasonal and site requirements. The \$1200 fee includes meals, free camping and workshop materials. Hotel accommodations can be arranged if preferred.

For more information or to register, contact Wayne Weiseman (618-893-4822 or 618-713-0537; pcproject@earthlink.net) or visit www.permacultureproject.com.

July 21–July 24

Permaculture Workshop
Center for Sustainable Community
Stelle, Illinois

The guest presenter for this workshop is Mark Shepard. For complete information about the workshop, including registration and costs, visit www.centerforsustainablecommunity.org/ <<http://www.centerforsustainablecommunity.org/>> and click on "Seminars and Programs."

August 4–7

Permaculture Workshop
Center for Sustainable Community
Stelle, Illinois

The guest presenter for this workshop is Bruce Rickard. For complete information about the workshop, including registration and costs, visit www.centerforsustainablecommunity.org/ <<http://www.centerforsustainablecommunity.org/>> and click on "Seminars and Programs."

September 12–15

Seeds and Breeds for the 21st Century
Ames, Iowa

Conference session topics will include the present situation of public plant and animal breeding capacity and the direction of public breeding and research and of federally funded programs. Attendees will learn about successful farmer-centered public and private plant and animal breeding programs. For more information, visit www.rafiusa.org/programs/Flyer_Seeds&Breeds2005.doc or contact Laura Lauffer (919-542-6067; laural@blast.com).

October 6–9

9th Annual Conference of the Community Food Security Coalition
Atlanta, Georgia

The conference will include field trips to local farms and gardens, keynote speakers, workshops on food system-related topics and meals serving locally grown food. For details, visit www.foodsecurity.org.

October 16–19

4th National Small Farm Conference
Sheraton Hotel
Greensboro, North Carolina

For more information, visit the conference website: www.csrees.usda.gov/nea/ag_systems/in_focus/smallfarms_if_conferences.html.

October 21–23

The 2005 Women in Sustainable Agriculture Conference
Burlington, Vermont

This national conference will honor the role of women in agriculture, celebrate the power of women's networks to create change and plant the seeds for future work. For information, visit www.uvm.edu/wagn/womeninag.html.

November 3–5

13th National Small Farm Trade Show and Conference
Columbia, Missouri

For details, visit www.smallfarmtoday.com.

While you're visiting the Farm Progress Show, plan to attend one of the informational seminars presented by Extension specialists and educators from the University of Illinois and Purdue University. The seminars will be held at Richland Community College on August 30 and 31 and September 1. Shuttles will be available to travel between the show grounds and the college.

- ***"Taking the First Step: Farm and Ranch Alternative Enterprise and Agritourism Resource Evaluation"*** will provide the needed tools to identify alternative enterprises and agritourism opportunities that can work for you.
- ***"Developing Agritourism as a Marketing Tool"*** will help you explore the possibilities for agritourism.

- ***"Market What You Sow"*** will let you learn from farmers who have been successful in marketing fruits, vegetables and grains.

These three seminars are co-sponsored by the Central Illinois Farm Fresh Network, University of Illinois Agro-Ecology Sustainable Agriculture Program, Macon County Soil and Water Conservation District, the Illinois Department of Agriculture, and Purdue University.

For more information, and a complete listing of the seminars being offered, visit web.extension.uiuc.edu/macon/farmprogress/95.html.

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Urbana, Illinois 61801

News and Perspectives

AGRO-ECOLOGY

Science and Education for a Sustainable Agriculture



Volume 14 • Number 3

Living Sustainably in Stelle

FALL 2005

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by Debra Levey Larson

Nestled in the midst of Illinois farmland is a little 44-home subdivision known as Stelle (rhymes with *well*). It has been called a cult, a commune and a doomsday community, but according to those who live there today, it's none of the above. You might call Stelle an intentional, or alternative, community, and although about a third of the current residents share some general beliefs about the environment and what it means to be a neighbor, the philosophy isn't mandatory. Today, anyone who wants to buy a house in Stelle can. But it wasn't always that way.

Stelle's Roots

In the late 1960s a kind and soft-spoken man from Chicago named Richard Kieninger had an idea of building a community, a sort of utopia—although that word was never actually used. He founded the Stelle Group—a philosophical organization which grew to almost 1,000 people. One of their common beliefs was to tithe—give a tenth of your earnings. Over time, that grew to enough money to purchase a 240-acre farm in the early 1970s. From 1971 to 1973, volunteers from the Stelle Group drove down from Chicago on the weekends and built the town. Their goal was to bring the best and leave the worst, care about your neighbor and foster a love for lifelong learning. These original qualities are still present in Stelle today.

It was in 1982 that Kieninger decided what he'd created in Stelle wasn't working. He hand-picked about a third of the residents to start a new community in Texas, which never fully materialized before most participants left.

But the Stelle that Kieninger left behind survived. It opened itself to anyone who wanted to live there; only two of the original Stelle-ites still do. Currently there are 44 homes and 100 residents, which include 25 children. Fifteen more house lots are available before the community becomes land-bound. But the surrounding property is an organic farm, so that's in keeping with Stelle's unwritten philosophy of the earth.

continued on next page



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College of Agricultural,
Consumer and
Environmental Sciences

The University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign is an affirmative action/equal opportunity institution.

If you would like to receive future issues of Agro-Ecology News and Perspectives, contact Deborah Cavanaugh-Grant (217-968-5512; cvnghgrn@uiuc.edu).

Acrobat PDF files of this and past issues are available at <http://www.aces.uiuc.edu/asap/news/newspersp.html>.

Stelle, continued

Bill Wilson, a long-time resident and occasional spokesperson for the community, tells the story of those early years of change: "In 1982, when a lot of people left Stelle, the rest of us sat down and asked, 'What are our goals now? What's our vision?' And the reality was that we just couldn't agree on a single vision. So over the years, Stelle became just a very nice place to live. About a third of the current residents are the most active—form committees, create community, serve on the Stelle Community Association Board, develop programs and are generally involved. About another third love living here but are pretty busy with their own lives. And then there's another third who appear to have little or no interest in community at all—we rarely see them."

Half of the adult citizens of Stelle are self-employed or work at a nearby picture-framing factory. The majority of the others work within a 35-mile radius, and a couple of residents even commute to Chicago.

Not a commune, but a community

The Stelle community center looks like just another house on the street. Inside is a small living room with a bookshelf. Its shelves are filled with reading material on a broad range of topics, from caring for aging parents to how to protect your PC. In another part of the center are a kitchen and a large room filled with long banquet tables. Wilson says that one of the ways they have worked at building a sense of community is to have meals together. The Monday Night Dinner Cooperative was created by 12 Stelle families. Once every 12 weeks, one family cooks a meal for everyone else, and they share it together in the community center. The other 11 Mondays, they just come and enjoy dinner cooked for them.

The community center also hosts a mail room and a community bulletin board. "Sometimes people post a gripe or a thank you or a notice about a pesky raccoon getting into their shed," says Wilson. "For four or five days there was a \$5 bill tacked up there that someone had found."

"This is also the place where ideas are shared. One time someone put up a note asking if others might be interested in creating a community vegetable garden. About half the town showed up. Today the Stelle Community Garden Cooperative is still operating by its original guidelines: If you work a lot, take a lot; if you work a little, take a little. Eight years later, the system is working just fine, and there's no paperwork.

About 20 families belong to a tool cooperative. They each pay \$10 a year as a maintenance fee and can use the community log splitter, steam carpet cleaner, lawn mower, table saw and other tools. "I love the tool coop," says Wilson. "It's much more economical than all 20 families each owning all their own equipment."



A sign greets visitors at the entrance to Stelle, a community of 44 homes southwest of Kankakee, Illinois.



Willow trees provide a canopy of shade over a foot path on the edge of town.

About the various cooperative efforts in Stelle, Wilson says that nine times out of ten, a lot of structure is just not needed. "Many of us have learned that to encourage community the best things to do are to work together, eat together and play together." The children find themselves in a safe and supportive environment, so they tend to run around in packs. "We lovingly refer to them 'Stelle's Angels,' " says Wilson. "Probably the best way to describe what it feels like to me to live in Stelle is to compare it to Andy Griffith's Mayberry."

Using state-of-the-art sustainability

Like Mayberry, Stelle depicts a quiet, paved neighborhood lined with sidewalks and storm sewers, front yards dotted with lawn ornaments and bicycles left in a hurry. But the rooftops of many Stelle houses sprout something Andy never saw: solar panels. In fact, about a third of the homes in Stelle have active or passive solar systems, far more than in other midwestern subdivisions.

Wilson says that some in the solar industry have nicknamed Stelle the Solar Capital of the Midwest. "We're at the end of the grid, so the power can be unreliable at times," says Wilson. "The goal for many residents who use solar panels is to even out the power supply and to take less off the grid—maybe even give energy back."

Spreading the solar story is one of Wilson's missions as director of the Center for Sustainable Community, a nonprofit organization that was formed in 2002 when a handful of Stelle residents wanted to share some of what they had learned over the years about sustainable and community living. After operating the center on a shoestring for 18 months, in 2003 the group decided that they needed someone to energize their efforts full-time, and Wilson was hired for that role. The center hosts workshops on a variety of sustainability topics and gives tours of Stelle.

One tour stop is the town's solar-powered telephone company, which also provides Stelle high-speed wireless Internet service. Another stop is a new home on the edge of town owned by Mark and Rhonda Wilkerson. Mark is the Midwest manager of SunWize Technologies, a solar distributor. With help from University of Illinois architect Brian Deal, the Wilkersons built their dream home, which is a

continued on page 5



Solar panels on the roof of the building that houses Stelle's solar-powered telephone company are raised about six inches to allow air to circulate under the panels.



Looking for frogs in the pond is a favorite activity of guests at the B & B.

Listening to the Landscape

Just down the road from Stelle is a beautifully kept two-story house surrounded by trees and a lush garden of vegetables and flowers. The Greenhouse Bed and Breakfast, owned and operated by Mark and Guia Hoffman, is affiliated with the Center for Sustainable Community—not for its guest rooms, but for the methods in permaculture being practiced on its grounds.

“Permaculture is one approach to sustainable agriculture,” says Deborah Cavanaugh-Grant, research specialist with the Agroecology/Sustainable Agriculture Program at the University of Illinois. “It



A ring of garlic grows around the base of a fruit tree.

aims to create a system that is economically viable, ecologically sound and socially responsible, but its underlying ethic is one of harmony with nature, abandoning the idea that humans have superiority over the natural world.”

As Mark Hoffman moves from one tree or shrub to another, he describes some of the ongoing experiments he and his wife Guia conduct on their property and the choices they’ve made through incorporating permaculture methods. It has resulted in some rather unusual landscaping. For example, around the base of each fruit tree, one or more vegetables are planted, and garlic grows in a ring around the pear tree to keep the borer population down. Mark says that although permaculture isn’t a method of organic gardening, similar principles come into play. If he and Guia

run into pest problems, they find natural ways like the garlic to deal with them rather than using chemicals.

Around a large cherry tree are planted three concentric circles—broccoli closest to the trunk, then cabbage, then asparagus. It’s another experiment. Mark has planted the ring of asparagus right at the “drip line” of the tree branches so that the asparagus sprouts will get more water than if they had been planted closer to the trunk, under the canopy. Mark likes these circular vegetable gardens because space is used more efficiently. What would otherwise stretch out to be a 50-foot garden strip fits compactly under the cherry tree.

Another tree sits in the center of a ring of oregano and eggplant. Mark liked the Italian theme of sorts. He finds enjoyment in the creativity and the experimentation of permaculture. One area smack in the middle of the front yard became a problem location, with nothing wanting to grow there. So the Hoffmans decided to “listen to the landscape” and created a water feature for that spot. With a small pathway leading past the new pond to an arbor with a bench, the frog-filled addition has become a favorite lingering spot for guests at the B&B.

Mark is deeply involved with the Center for Sustainable Community, which annually hosts permaculture workshops taught by the Hoffmans and other professionals. For more information on the Greenhouse Bed and Breakfast, visit <http://www.greenhousebed.com/>. 



Bill Wilson introduces Mark Hoffman before touring the gardens that surround the Greenhouse B & B.



Mark Wilkerson points to solar panels on the rooftop of his newly constructed home in Stelle. His home was one stop on a tour hosted by the U of I Agroecology/Sustainable Agriculture Program.

model of solar power and sustainability. The 30 batteries in the basement continually store enough power from the solar panels on the roof that the family could get through a winter on stored power.

Sustaining beliefs from a superstitious past

Although founder Richard Kieninger held some fundamental humanitarian ideologies that are still respected in Stelle, he also was certain that the world as we know it would end on May 5, 2000. It was that belief that drove the original settlers to their new location and gave them the passion to build the community, but that same belief gave Stelle a reputation for being a "doomsday commune." Though the end-time ideas left with Kieninger in 1982, the false reputation persists in the minds of a few. And it's that earlier association that causes the road signs to Stelle to disappear. "Young people just like to steal them as a novelty, I guess," says Wilson. "Almost every spring some high school kids will drive through town honking their horns and yelling, and they steal the road signs on their way to or from Stelle. These signs are probably decorating a college dorm room somewhere."

So there are no road signs to guide the curious from the highway to Stelle. You just have to know which county road to turn onto. A running joke in the early days was that if you could find Stelle, you were meant to be there, Wilson says. And although Kieninger's doomsday has come and gone, the citizens of Stelle continue to thrive, exploring new ways to live more sustainably every day. ☸

For more information about Stelle and its efforts in sustainability, visit <http://www.centerforsustainablecommunity.org/>.

Western Illinois Farmer Experiments with Okra

by Dan Anderson



Okra grower, Mike Vincent, has worked with several UI-ACES faculty to help answer production questions.



Okra is not a host for rust or soybean cyst nematode.

A growing number of Illinois farmers are looking beyond corn and soybeans to boost profits and diversify farm income. Many of these alternative crops are already established, albeit acres are still small. Still, for those willing to switch gears and try something new, there are options already proven to work in Illinois.

Then there are farmers like Mike Vincent in Pike County, near the small town of Hull. Vincent grows corn and beans, but when he read some nutritional data on okra, the wheels of opportunity started turning. The market for fresh okra is well established, but Vincent wondered about the feasibility of growing okra for the seed to use as livestock feed or to press into vegetable oil.

Okra (*Abelmoschus esculentus*) originated in tropical Africa, and cultivation spread around the world with the African slave trade. The plant grows as an annual in the Midwest and is extremely tolerant to drought. According to University of Illinois Extension, okra is a powerhouse of valuable nutrients. A half cup of cooked okra contains nearly 10 percent of the daily recommended levels of vitamin B6 and folic acid. Okra is also very high in protein. Vincent points out that "it can be fed directly to animals without any processing."

In 2004, Vincent received a North Central Region Sustainable Agriculture, Research and Education (NCR-SARE) Producer Grant to test some of the production aspects of okra. He has



Mike Vincent's okra seed has tested at 25% protein. The oil is 69% unsaturated.

conducted nitrogen rate studies and variety testing. Early results are encouraging, but questions and hurdles remain before okra can become Illinois' "third crop." "No work has been done on okra in Illinois," says Vincent. He has sent bags of the seed to the USDA research center in Peoria for testing, but has not received the results yet. Feeding trials are needed to determine if okra is appropriate for animals. And finding someone to press the oil has been difficult. "Press operators don't want to clean out their presses for a small batch of seed," he says.

Vincent is a knowledgeable and experienced farmer who has done his homework and knows what he's talking about. He says that he's a

one-man okra band swimming uphill with a good idea that may not catch on until after he's long gone. Still, someone has to be the innovator, and if okra is ever an important feed grain or oil crop in Illinois, Mike Vincent, in the tiny town of Hull, on the western edge of the state may be considered the man who started it all. ☞

Dan Anderson is a research specialist with the Agroecology/Sustainable Agriculture Program at the U of I. (217- 333-1588; aslan@uiuc.edu). Photos in this article were taken by Dan Anderson.

Call for Grant Proposals

The North Central Region Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education (NCR-SARE) 2005 Call for Farmer Rancher Grant proposals is now available at <http://www.sare.org/ncrsare/cfp.htm>.

Proposals are due in the Lincoln NCR-SARE office by December 1, 2005. The Farmer Rancher Grant Selection Committee will review the proposals during January and February 2006, and the NCR-SARE administrative council will recommend projects for funding in March. Grant recipients will be notified in March or April 2006. There have been several changes to the call this year, so applicants should be sure to use the 2005 call for proposals rather than a version from previous years. The biggest changes are in the timeline and budget requirements, so please review these areas carefully.

For questions about the call for proposals, to share potential grant ideas or for a hard copy, contact Joan Benjamin, Farmer Rancher Grant Program Coordinator at 1-800-529-1342 or Deborah Cavanaugh-Grant, SARE Coordinator, (217-968-5512; cvnghgrn@uiuc.edu). ☞

Fighting Plant Disease



by Debra Levey Larson

Evelyn Riebe owes her sanity to organic foods. "When I was 20 years old, I lost my mind," she said. "Finally my doctor figured out that I was allergic to petrochemicals. Once I started eating all organic foods, my mind was clear again."

Today, Riebe farms almost 200 acres about 10 miles west of Pontiac, Illinois. On Short Point Organic Farm, she grows certified organic oats, corn, food grade soybeans and blue corn. She also has a small vegetable garden for her personal use.

Riebe attended a sustainable agriculture tour at the University of Illinois, hoping to pick up some strategies to fight off plant diseases and kill weeds without using chemicals. Her latest

Darin Eastburn and graduate student Shin-Yi Li present information on how to control plant disease at a sustainable agriculture tour at the University of Illinois.

concern is Canada thistle. The way she treats it now is by using deep tillage that gets at the roots, then going down the field rows with a hoe, individually digging the weeds out.

"When you are certified organic, you can't usually use a rescue treatment with a chemical. There are a few products approved for use in organic systems, but the options are very limited and should be considered as a last resort. So the best thing to do is to focus on prevention," says University of Illinois plant pathologist Darin Eastburn.

Eastburn says you can control diseases by changing variables in one or more of four areas: the host or crop; the pathogen, which could be a fungus, bacterium, virus or nematode; the environment; and time.

"For example, if you use crop rotation, the pathogen cannot survive because you keep changing the host," he says. "Another way is to plant varieties that are resistant to disease. You need to know your crop and keep good records to know which varieties to plant."

Another strategy is to make the environment unattractive to the pathogen. "About 80 percent of plant diseases are caused by a fungus of some sort," says Eastburn. "And most fungi do best under high humidity. Dense crop canopies provide shade and restrict air movement, which promotes higher humidity, so spreading out the plants can help make the environment less conducive to fungal growth."

Without Chemicals

He explained that another way to change the environment is to irrigate in the morning rather than at night. "If you irrigate in the evening, the crop stays moist through the night and the conditions are more favorable for fungi to grow. But if you water in the early morning, the sun dries off the plants more quickly, making the environment unsuitable for the pathogen to grow."

The saying "Timing is everything" can apply to controlling plant diseases as well as to planting dates. Eastburn advises that "if you plant early, the crop may already be well established by the time a particular pathogen is trying to emerge. Or you might delay planting until after the most favorable period for infection has past."

Eastburn and graduate student Shin-Yi Li are a part of a larger organic research project at the U of I. Their portion of the research is looking at soil pathogens such as sudden death syndrome, brown stem rot, charcoal rot and *Phytophthora* root and stem rot of soybeans. Li gathers soil samples from the organic plots, takes them to the greenhouse, adds pathogens to the soil and evaluates the amount of disease that develops.

On the field plot, they've added compost in three different levels (none, 15 tons per acre and 30 tons per acre) to evaluate the effects of adding organic matter on root disease development. "We purposely planted a soybean variety that's susceptible to a number of diseases. It's a liberty you can take with research that no farmer would want to do," said Eastburn.

He said that adding organic matter to the soil is thought to stimulate the micro-organisms in the soil that suppress plant pathogens. "Our hypothesis is that the highest level of compost (30 tons per acre) will have the lowest incidence of disease." Similar studies on other crops have found that adding composts to soil results in less infection by soilborne pathogens. "We want to find out if the same thing will occur in this system, which is in the transition process of organic certification. We hope that our findings will be useful for growers in Illinois who are trying to figure out the best way to transition from conventional to organic agriculture."

Eastburn is in the third year of a five-year study. 🌱

Evelyn Riebe points to a clump of Canada thistle as an example of one of the biggest weed problems on her organic farm.





Marty Williams gestures toward sweet corn test plots at a recent weed tour at the University of Illinois.

Corn That Creates Its Own Shade

by Debra Levey Larson

It makes sense that if weeds can't get a lot of sun, they won't be able to grow as well. Marty Williams, an ecologist with the USDA's Agricultural Research Service (ARS) in the College of Agricultural, Consumer and Environmental Sciences at the University of Illinois, used this premise as he began his search for sweet corn hybrids that have the ability to naturally suppress weeds.

"There aren't a lot of tools for weed management in sweet corn, so I decided to look at the inherent characteristics in different hybrids that might help reduce some weeds naturally," Williams says. "Using a more competitive hybrid—one that naturally suppresses weeds—means farmers can use less herbicide and get more consistent crop yields."

"Using a more competitive hybrid—one that naturally suppresses weeds—means farmers can use less herbicide and get more consistent crop yields."

For his study, Williams chose three commercially available sweet corn hybrids that have different canopies—Spirit, WH2801 and GH2547—to determine how the density of the canopy might affect weed growth. "Unfortunately, it's not practical to do this study for every hybrid. There are just too many," said Williams. "But what we hope to do is eventually get enough information to classify hybrids as competitive or not competitive in weeds."

Wild proso millet was grown at low, medium and high weed densities within the sweet corn hybrids. This particular weed was chosen because it is one of the fastest-spreading annual grass weeds in the Cornbelt and it's a significant problem because few herbicides are effective against it in sweet corn.

Last year's results showed that Spirit, a hybrid with little canopy, had a 70 percent yield loss at high weed

Test plots from 2004 show in the foreground wild proso millet and the dramatic difference in the canopies of three sweet corn hybrids in the background: GH2547, left; Spirit, center; WH2801, right.



Suppresses Weeds Naturally


pressure. It didn't tolerate weeds very well at all. WH2801, which was taller, fared better in its ability to suppress weeds while maintaining a high yield. GH2547, which had the largest canopy, did even better at both. "And since it managed to suppress weed seed production better, there would be fewer weeds emerging next year in that field," says Williams.

The same experiment is being conducted now to see if the results are consistent under drier conditions observed this year.

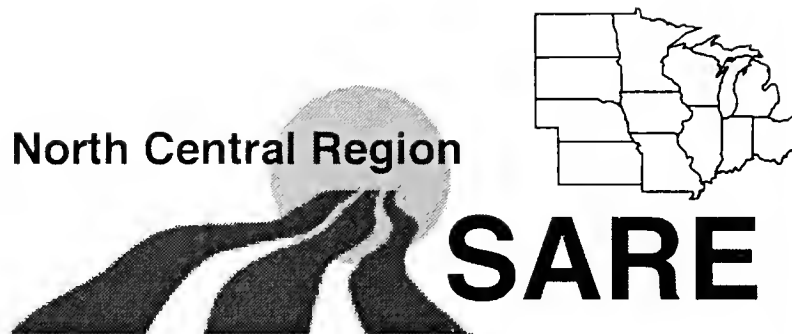
In Illinois, processed sweet corn sold in cans or frozen in bags or on the cob is a significant commodity. Illinois, Wisconsin and Minnesota supply about half of the sweet corn for processing in the United States. Washington State provides the other half. Rick Boydston, with USDA-ARS at Prosser, Washing-

ton, is duplicating Williams's canopy experiment. According to Williams, "the results from Dr. Boydston's first year were similar but not as dramatic as ours here in Illinois. Any differences in the ability of hybrids to suppress weeds are important, since every bit helps."

This study is focusing on yield and weed suppression, but yield isn't the only consideration. What about the sweet corn sugar content, taste and appearance? In another research project, Williams is looking at about a dozen different quality traits and determining how they are affected by the weeds. "For example, the number of ears is important for fresh market sweet corn—what you find in the produce aisle—whereas kernel weight is extremely important for sweet corn grown for processing—what you buy in the can," said Williams. "Since

eradicating every weed in sweet corn is impractical, we need to know exactly how weeds, particularly at low densities, influence these traits." 

North Central Region



SARE

RESOURCES FROM SARE

Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education (SARE) provides grants and information to improve profitability, stewardship and quality of life.

Free! SARE's 2005 Highlights

Before adopting promising new agricultural strategies such as diversified, profitable crop rotations, innovative pest management measures, or raising meat for unique markets producers want evidence of success. The 2005 SARE Highlights features a dozen practical, profit-enhancing ideas that have been researched and tested at universities and on farms and ranches. The 2005 report is the latest of a series of publications that shine a light on some of the most creative research funded by SARE.

For a free copy, go to www.sare.org/publications/highlights.htm or email san_assoc@sare.org or call 301-504-5411.

SAVE THE DATE!


The SARE 5th national conference is set for Aug. 15-17, 2006

in Oconomowoc, Wisconsin.

For more information, visit www.sare.org/ncrsare/2006_national_conference.htm.

The New American Farmer, 2nd edition

Hailing from small vegetable farms, cattle ranches and grain farms covering thousands of acres, the producers in *The New American Farmer*, 2nd edition have embraced new approaches to agriculture. They are renewing profits, enhancing environmental stewardship and improving the lives of their families as well as their communities. This newly published 200-page book includes photos of each producer and contact information so readers can learn more.

Download the publication for free or order hard copies for \$16.95 plus shipping and handling at <http://www.sare.org/publications/naf.htm>. 

Changes for ASAP


by Dan Anderson

With change being the only constant in this world, it was bound to happen that the Agroecology/Sustainable Agriculture Program (ASAP) would have to eventually reorganize. For many years the program has been cranking along accomplishing a surprising amount with its two staff members – me and Deborah Cavanaugh-Grant. For the most part, Deborah and I have divided up the duties and have had our hand in just about everything going on in Illinois that has to do with sustainable agriculture. But being primarily outward focused, we've limited our attention to farmers and organizations outside of the University of Illinois campus. During that time, things within the College of ACES were slowly changing. The number of college faculty working on topics related to sustainable agriculture has steadily grown.

About two years ago, Deborah and I were moved from the ACES Office of Research to the Department of Natural Resources and Environmental Sciences (NRES) under the direct supervision of newly hired NRES department head Wes Jarrell. One of the first things Dr. Jarrell did was call an open meeting on sustainable agriculture, inviting any campus faculty or staff who believed they were doing work related to the field. There was a tremendous response to that meeting. About 60 people showed up, and many others, unable to attend, indicated a strong interest. At this meeting, we simply went around the room and each described why we were there. It became clear that there was much more going on right here on campus than we were aware of. It also became clear that ASAP would have to change in order incorporate all of this sustainable agriculture activity.

Soon after that meeting Wes Jarrell appointed Michelle Wander as faculty supervisor over the ASAP. This was the first time the ASAP had the advantage of faculty leadership, and Dr. Wander's involvement provided an important link to other campus faculty working on sustainable agriculture. Dr. Mike Mazzocco also joined our leadership team as an informal ACES administration liaison. Mazzocco's involvement underscores our desire that ASAP serve the whole college, not just the NRES department. He has been very helpful in advising us and advocating for the program at every level in the college.

In October of 2004, I joined Dr. Wander and Jarrell for a three-day executive leadership workshop, a collaborative program developed by the Council for Agricultural Science and Technology and the Institute for Conservation Leadership. It was at this workshop the new vision for ASAP really started to take shape, and the foundation to implement change was laid.

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Sustainable Capitalism:

A Matter of Common Sense

by John Ikerd

A new book by John Ikerd is available through Kumarian Press, Inc. *Sustainable Capitalism: A Matter of Common Sense* addresses the philosophical and scientific roots of sustainability, examines neglected ethical and moral aspects of capitalist economic theory and advocates a new sustainable paradigm for all living organizations, businesses, economics, and societies.

"For years, John Ikerd's writings and speeches have provided precious insights into the economics of this nation's food system, exploding the myth that factory farms are economically imperative," said Robert F. Kennedy, Jr. "In this brilliant book, he makes a powerful case for a new capitalistic economy: one that is environmentally sound, socially just, and economically sustainable."

During his academic career, John Ikerd served on the faculties of North Carolina State University, Oklahoma State University, the University of Georgia, and the University of Missouri. Ikerd spent the last half of his academic career and much of his time since retirement developing and testing the concepts and principles of an alternative development paradigm, the economics of sustainability, which are elucidated in his book.

Sustainable Capitalism: A Matter of Common Sense is 232 pages in length and available in paperback for \$21.95.

To order, contact:

Kumarian Press, Inc.
1294 Blue Hills Avenue
Bloomington, CT 06002

Phone: (800) 289-2664

Email: kpbooks@kpbooks.com

Website: <http://www.kpbooks.com> 

CALENDAR

October 22

Farm Beginnings Program

Bloomington, Illinois

See the back page of this issue for more information.

November 3 – 5

13th National Small Farm Trade Show & Conference

Columbia, Missouri

For information, visit <http://www.smallfarmtoday.com>.

November 9 – 1:30 p.m. to 3:00 p.m.

November 15 – 6:30 p.m. to 8:00 p.m.

Pond Management Telenet Seminars

Seminar topics to be covered by U of I Extension educators in natural resources management will include managing aquatic vegetation, fish management, and basic pond ecology. Handouts will be provided, and time will be allowed for questions. Certified Crop Advisor continuing education units in soil and water management, integrated pest management, and professional development have been applied for. For more information, contact Duane Friend (217-782-6515; friend@uiuc.edu).

December 1

Marketing Strategies for Consumer-Driven Agriculture Conference

Interstate Center

Bloomington, Illinois

U of I Extension will host this second annual conference addressing the marketing challenges and opportunities

faced by farmers and food entrepreneurs. Speakers will include experienced direct market farmers, university professors, experts in food business, web designers, and Extension professionals. Topics will range from farmers' markets to foreign markets, and provide insight on how to be successful in value-added enterprises. Conference registration is \$40. For information, contact Kim Tack (309-792-2500; kimtack@uiuc.edu) or visit <http://web.extension.uiuc.edu/iidea/services.htm>.

January 11-12, 2006

2nd Annual Illinois Organic Production Conference

Interstate Center

Bloomington, Illinois

See the back page of this issue for more information.

U of I Extension Web Calendar

The University of Illinois Extension maintains a website with an extensive listing of events, workshops, seminars, and other activities happening around the State of Illinois.

Visit <http://www.extension.uiuc.edu/> and click on the tab at the top labeled "Calendar." From there you can search for an event by month, keyword, date, or select from a list of major topic areas.

Changes for ASAP, continued

Since the workshop, a new advisory board has been formed for ASAP. This board represents a vastly broader group of individuals from on- and off-campus to help guide us in the development of an ASAP for the future. Another important change will be a new website for the program. Our ASAP website has been an important tool for disseminating sustainable agriculture information, but the new site will be much more. Using an open-source software called Plone, the new ASAP site will facilitate a virtual community around sustainable agriculture in Illinois. Starting with all those on campus engaged in sustainable ag work, and eventually including anyone around the state involved in sustainable agriculture, people will have moderated access

to the site with the ability to directly contribute content in the form of research results, upcoming events, press releases, bulletins, images, and stories that contribute to and promote the ideals of sustainable agriculture in Illinois.

Other changes are coming, maybe even a new name. Hopefully the new ASAP will do an even better job accomplishing our mission, to "facilitate and promote research and education which protects Illinois' natural and human resources while sustaining agricultural production forever." But, for now, stay tuned for updates on our progress and the official release of the new website. ☺

OPENINGS STILL AVAILABLE IN FARM BEGINNINGS PROGRAM

There are still a few slots available in the Farm Beginnings program that is scheduled to begin on October 22. The 10-month course will be taught by established farmers and experienced Extension and other professionals. Farm Beginnings training addresses sustainable production, family goal setting, business planning and management, and marketing practices, and it creates an opportunity for participants to network with established, sustainable farmers.

All sessions are conducted at the McLean County Unit Office, 402 N. Hershey Rd., Bloomington, Illinois


For more information, visit <http://www.farmbeginnings.uiuc.edu/>. To register for the program, contact Deborah Cavanaugh-Grant (217-968-5512; cvnghgrn@uiuc.edu).

2nd Annual Illinois Organic Production Conference

January 11-12, 2006
Interstate Center
Bloomington, IL

The January 2005 Organic Conference drew nearly 180 people from Illinois and surrounding states demonstrating a strong interest in organic production.

- Two days of excellent research presentations
- Farmer-based information on organic grain crops, specialty crops, livestock and marketing
- Extensive networking opportunities
- More vendors, more speakers, larger facility

For more information, contact Dan Anderson (217- 333-1588; aslan@uiuc.edu) or visit <http://www.aces.uiuc.edu/asap/orgconf/>. 

AGRO-ECOLOGY

News and Perspectives

University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign
College of Agricultural, Consumer and Environmental Sciences
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News and Perspectives

2005

AGRO-ECOLOGY

Science and Education for a Sustainable Agriculture



Volume 14 • Number 4

Mini-Grants Promote Sustainability

WINTER 2005

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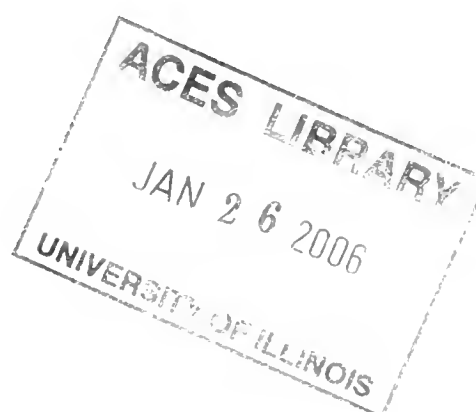
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What would you do with \$500 to \$1,000? It's a question that 12 forward-thinking people and their teams answered this past year as they reported on how they used the money they received from a mini-grant. The grants are available from the University of Illinois through United States Department of Agriculture North Central Region Sustainable Agriculture, Research and Education (USDA NCR SARE) Professional Development Program.

This issue of *Agroecology News & Perspectives* features stories of how four of the 2005 mini-grant recipients used the funding they received.

- 1 Carrie Edgar created a food festival to showcase locally grown foods in Quincy.
- 2 Rhonda Ferree and Kevin McGuire conducted a survey to identify sustainable activities in Fulton County.
- 3 Debra Ruff's workshop entitled, *From Seed to Store* taught 20 K-8 teachers where food comes from through activities and field trips.
- 4 Jim Morrison studied the effect of small grain cover crops on yield of corn through a research project.

See page 12 for a complete list of the 2005 mini-grant recipients and application information for the 2006 mini-grants.



College of Agricultural,
Consumer and
Environmental Sciences

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Agro-Ecology News and Perspectives is published by the College of Agricultural, Consumer and Environmental Sciences, Agroecology/Sustainable Agriculture Program, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign (UIUC). This newsletter is designed to inform its readers about the well being of human and natural communities through the adoption of agricultural practices and farming systems that are economically viable, environmentally sound, and socially just. This issue was edited by Deborah Cavanaugh-Grant and Debra Levey Larson, designed by Scherer Communications and produced by Roberts Design Company. Copy editing by Molly Bentsen. Photos not credited in this issue were taken by Debra Levey Larson.

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If you would like to receive future issues of *Agro-Ecology News and Perspectives*, contact Deborah Cavanaugh-Grant (217-968-5512; cvnghgrn@uiuc.edu).

Acrobat PDF files of this and past issues are available at <http://www.aces.uiuc.edu/asap/news/newspersp.html>.



Quincy Farmers' Market Meets Iron Chef

by Debra Levey Larson

Carrie Edgar went to a harvest festival at the Missouri Botanical Garden in St. Louis and came away with an idea. "We could do this kind of thing in Quincy!" she said. Edgar is the leader for the University of Illinois Extension Adams/Brown unit in Quincy. She coordinates an effort called Locally Grown/Locally Good. "The goal of the program is to help producers market locally grown products. It also involves educating consumers and retailers about the availability, nutritional aspects, and economic and environmental impacts of buying local," she said. "Holding a food festival that features locally grown food in conjunction with the already popular Quincy farmers' market seemed like the perfect event."

Quincy is a city of about 40,000 people and the largest town for 100 miles around. The farmers' market runs every Saturday from May to October.

Edgar applied for a mini-grant from the University of Illinois made available through professional development funds of the USDA North Central Region Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education program. She received \$1,000. "The event itself cost a lot more, but the \$1,000 mini-grant was the seed money that got it started. Then we went out and began pulling in partners." U of I Extension and the Quincy Park District staff provided games and activities for youth throughout the day including a watermelon-eating and seed-spitting contest, gunny-sack races, a duck pond, and parachute games. "We also had Klutzy the Clown on hand to entertain the kids," said Edgar. "Klutzy is one of our Master Gardeners and an Extension Council member as well as a professional clown." Volunteers from the Chamber of Commerce Agriculture committee and the Western Illinois Sustainable Agriculture Society also helped with the event.

In addition to the farmers' market, attendees could buy a lunch of local products: locally grown watermelon, tea from a local herb guild, and baked goods from a local baker. Area pork producers used all local pork to offer pork sandwiches for sale.

"We had some booths with an educational component as well. We had one that showed people how far their food travels to get to them, others about gardening and sustainable ag and one that had 'weird' vegetables, like purple potatoes that people could taste," said Edgar.

A highlight of the food fest was showcasing local chefs in a cook-off. A letter was sent to all local chefs, and the first who responded were selected. "What



The winning chefs in the Locally Grown Chef Cook-off Contest were Michael and Nadine Mitchell, owners of restaurant Busy Bistro which hadn't yet opened at the time of the festival.
Photo by Carrie Edgar.

vendors at the farmers' market included a local flower seller. Photo by Lisa Wigoda.

the chefs got out of the event was exposure for their restaurants. The winner was a team who own a new restaurant called Busy Bistro that hadn't even opened yet," Edgar said.

The chefs didn't know what foods they would get to cook with until the day before the event. Neither did Edgar. She and her staff bought whatever was available locally that first week of August. All of the chefs were given the same fruits and vegetables -- peaches, raspberries, tomatoes, and zucchini. "They weren't told to, but they each individually came up with a soup, a salad and a dessert. They were told that they could bring other things to supplement the dishes like seasonings, rice, and noodles but each dish had to highlight the local product."

Up on the big stage provided by the park district, each chef was given tables and a hot plate. They were allowed to bring other appliances if they needed them. "They were given 35 minutes to prepare the meal so they were working really fast. We modeled it after the Iron Chef shows. And while they cooked, a local news anchor interviewed them and gave a running commentary for the audience."

Scoring sheets were developed for local celebrity-judges, to rate each chef. "The scores for the three chefs were very close," Edgar said.

Most of the money raised for the event, including the \$1,000 mini-grant, was spent on the food for the cook-off, and the live musicians who were hired to



One popular activity at the food fest for kids was a watermelon-eating contest. The winner was the contestant who finished eating a slice of watermelon fastest. Photo by Lisa Wigoda.



Approximately 30 volunteers were on duty during the day to help with the food fest. Pictured here are Gary Balke, Edwin Waters and Joe Newkirk. Photo by Lisa Wigoda.

play throughout the day. Renting a sound system plus tables and chairs for the information booths was another big expense. "Our local radio stations and newspaper gave us a lot of free advertising and another sponsor, Great River Economic Development Foundation, produced the posters and banners.

"We had a sign-up to win a festival basket and collected 165 names, addresses and e-mail addresses," said Edgar. "And although it was impossible to get a completely accurate count, the unofficial guess was that the event attracted three to four times as many people as usually come on a Saturday. A typical farmers' market brings about 400 people to Quincy each Saturday," said Edgar. "What's even better is that the vendors have said that attendance on Saturday's has increased since the event."

Edgar described the reaction to the food fest as very positive. "Local producers were very grateful. They said that this never would have happened if it hadn't been for us. There were lots more producers and lots more customers. Some who had never come to the farmers' market have now become regulars."

Some long-range plans have also been made as a result of the food fest. "We're looking at starting a local food policy council that would examine our local food system, issues on food in the schools, and what we can do as a community so all people can have access to fresh fruits and vegetables," said Edgar.

For the first food fest in August 2005, the planning started in February. Edgar said they have already begun planning for next year's event. 🍌

For more information about the Quincy food fest, contact Carrie Edgar (217-223-8380; cedgar@uiuc.edu).

2 *Who's Doing What in Fulton County?*

Over the past two years, University of Illinois Extension personnel in Fulton County detected a notable increase in inquiries about alternative agriculture. The staff wanted to know more precisely who was doing what with alternative and sustainable agriculture in the county, in order to develop appropriate programming. They designed a project to further explore the possibilities and obtained a mini-grant to help with phase one of the project -- assessment.

According to Extension unit leader Rhonda Ferree, "Fulton County residents were asking for information about alternative crops, organic growing and certification, pastured poultry, enterprise development, marketing, and other areas related to alternative agriculture at a rate of about two or three questions per week."



Living Earth Farm is a Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) Farm. Children of CSA families and the local Canton YMCA Day Camp participate each summer in Country Sprouts, where they learn how to identify, grow, tend, harvest and use fresh vegetables in simple recipes. The event is hosted by Living Earth Farm owner Anne Patterson. In this photo participants are making "veggie people."

"We knew of one subscription-based CSA (community-supported agriculture) business, at least one pastured poultry enterprise, a farmers' market, at least two orchards, an elk producer, two ginseng growers, one hydroponic produce grower, and a high-end restaurant with an interest in locally grown food. We heard rumors of vineyards, value-added beef, and a hybrid striped bass aquaculture operation, to name just a few," said Ferree.

Ferree said that the general outline for the project had been in the works for some time, but the opportunity to launch the project followed the receipt of a mini-grant from the Sustainable Agriculture Mini-grant Program. "The grant allowed us to hire Julie Mellert to conduct the fieldwork of the project," said Ferree. Mellert is an undergraduate student at U of I majoring in Agribusiness, Farm & Financial.



Ferree and educator Kevin McGuire worked with Mellert to develop a list of interview questions and compile a list of initial contacts based on previous inquiries to the unit, Canton farmers' market vendors, and local knowledge. After an introductory letter was sent out in early June 2004, Mellert conducted 18 interviews over the phone or in person, completing them in early August.

"A strong and recurrent theme in the interviews was that of 'family labor' or 'doing the work themselves' with only a few of the enterprises hiring outside labor, primarily to get through busy, labor-intensive times such as harvest," said McGuire.

Kyle Dillman, a former employee of Living Earth Farm holds head lettuce grown on the farm. Patterson likes to hire local youth like Dillman to work at the farm.



Youth from Canton YMCA Day Camp transplant cabbage plants at Country Sprouts. Anne Patterson, who is a registered dietitian and sustainable vegetable grower, hosts events to help educate young children about growing, identifying, tending, harvesting and using vegetables.


So, with this information in hand, what's the next step for Fulton County Extension?

"One of the themes that seemed to recur in several lines of inquiry was that of market development and consumer education and awareness," said Ferree. "In talking about markets, participants commented that there isn't much of a local market, and one said that he has not figured out where to sell his product. And several producers transport their products long distances to reach market areas where consumers show a greater willingness to pay for high-quality or specially produced agricultural products. So, this is one area that we'll be looking into further."

Grants and incentives were also asked about by many producers. McGuire said that promoting grant programs and skill-building programs in grant writing might be useful in helping support alternative agriculture development in Fulton County.

The labor intensity of alternative agriculture operations was another topic that came up frequently in interviews. "We'd like to do some further inquiry and discussion with participants about balancing on-farm and off-farm workloads as well as the possibility of finding creative and even cooperative ways to address labor needs," said McGuire.

In phase two of the project, Ferree said they hope to get project participants together for a facilitated discussion of the issues. "We'd like to include a resource fair and have representatives available from agencies or organizations that provide grants, low interest loans, or technical assistance that might be useful to our participants," she said.

Ferree said that this first phase of the project was successful in giving the Fulton unit staff knowledge of the local alternative agriculture landscape. "We now have a better understanding of who's doing what with alternative/sustainable agriculture in Fulton County and we have a more complete mailing list of alternative agriculture enterprises in the county." 

For more information, contact Rhonda Ferree (309-547-3711; ferreer@uiuc.edu).



Living Earth Farm is located near Farmington in Fulton County. The farm grows spinach, lettuce and a variety of Asian greens to sell direct to customers and to a local natural food store.

3 *From Seed to Store*

"There are two dangers in not owning a farm. One is the danger of supposing that breakfast comes from the grocery, and the other that heat comes from the furnace."

A Sand County Almanac
by Aldo Leopold



A representative of ADM shows the group a sample of their hydroponic lettuce.

Because the majority of Americans do not own a farm and probably don't even tend a small garden in their backyard, Leopold's fears that the non-farming public is naïve about where their food comes from could be well founded. "We are now a society that is dominated by urban centers, and most have lost touch with the significant contributions of the agricultural community," said Debbie Ruff, Education/Executive Director with the Livingston County Soil and Water Conservation District (SWCD). "Many people don't know or care where their food and fiber originate other than 'the store.' They probably don't think a lot about the interconnected relationship that exists between man, our natural resources, and the production of food and fiber products," she said.

In order to address this problem, Livingston County's SWCD, University of Illinois Extension and Farm Bureau invited K-8 educators and administrators to a workshop entitled *From Seed to Store*. It was part of a three-day summer teacher training with the Illinois Farm Bureau's network of Summer Ag Institutes, and it was funded in part by a University of Illinois NCR-SARE mini-grant. Darla Binkley, U of I Extension unit leader from Livingston County, and Teresa Grant-Quick, manager of the Livingston County Farm Bureau, helped in the planning and execution of the workshop.

"This was the second year for us hosting a Summer Ag Institute," said Ruff. "So this year we sent letters to all of the Livingston County school principals and to all participants of our first SAI. We also had news releases in area media and 'talked it up' whenever possible."

Workshop activities and resource materials were selected to show the broad scope of agricultural and environmental issues and how they are interrelated. The curriculum areas of math, science, geography, literature, history, nutrition, and art were all incorporated. "Teachers were exposed to a wide variety of hands-on experiences that demonstrated the 'web of life' that exists between our food, fiber, fuels, soil, water, air, plants, animals, and man. Activities started with very basic concepts and progressed to more complex thinking and problem solving," said Ruff.

The workshop also addressed social, economic, and environmental issues. "During the three days, participants learned that our natural resources must be sustained in order to continue enjoying the quality of life that now exists," said Ruff. "They were shown the value of proper resource management systems that agriculture employs to protect the environment and sustain our existing resources. Without these systems, our natural resources' health declines, and this in turn affects consumers - both socially and economically."



A tower-building contest with cornstarch packing peanuts was one of the fun activities.



Workshop Highlights

This "From Seed to Store" educator workshop could have easily been titled "Science-Technology-Sustainability" as every facet of the workshop dealt with how farmers use science, technology, and hard work to sustain the resources we depend upon and to grow enough food for a growing world population. Here's a list of some of the activities:

- Soil Science 101 with your SWCD and NRCS
- Presentations by representatives of the corn and soybean industries to talk about renewable fuels and the vast amount of products that come from these crops
- Lunch and Learn with soil-testing lab owner Georgia Steffen. She discussed the need to maintain soil with proper nutrients for plant growth. She used several demonstrations and strongly emphasized the need for soil tests to "know" your soil. She stressed that whether you are a backyard gardener or a 1,000-acre corn farmer, you should only apply the amount of nutrients a soil needs to maintain fertility.
- Workshop participants learned some of the "very basic" principles of biotechnology during a workshop entitled "What the Heck is Biotech?" The workshop utilized several hands-on activities including extracting DNA from strawberries and human saliva.
- The group toured the hydroponics greenhouse and fish farm at ADM in Decatur. Participants learned that ADM does not use chemicals in their lettuce production. They depend upon natural pest management techniques. They also saw that the tilapia help recycle the waste water from the hydroponics enterprise.
- Mark Bunselmyer told the workshop participants about the labor-intensive crop of horseradish.
- Enroute to tour stops, the group participated in a "windshield tour" of farming practices that reduce erosion, maintain fertility, and use the least amount of chemicals possible.
- Toy implements from various equipment dealerships were brought in so teachers could learn about what different pieces of equipment are used for and the costs to farmers to operate such equipment.
- Graymont Co-op brought out a handheld GPS unit and demonstrated how it is used. They then explained how this technology is used in the field to only put fertilizers where they are needed.
- A combine was brought to the workshop. Each participant had the opportunity to sit in the cab and see all the technology that farmers use to monitor a crop's production.

Award-winning photo essayist Raymond Bial provided a presentation on the writing of two of his books, *A Handful of Dirt* and *Corn Belt Harvest*. His presentation utilized a slide show and provided an in-depth look at all the research and time that went into the writing of these books. A corn luncheon was held as part of his presentation to highlight how important this commodity is to our everyday menus.



Participants were able to see a combine up close.



Author Raymond Bial autographs the books that the teachers received as part of the grant.

Education professionals from the Illinois Department of Agriculture, University of Illinois Extension, Illinois Farm Bureau, the Regional Office of Education for McLean, Livingston, and DeWitt Counties, and others were consulted to ensure a well-rounded curriculum. The workshop was registered with the Illinois State Board of Education (ISBE), and teachers could receive 24 continuing professional development units. Two or three hours of graduate credit were also available from the University of Illinois depending upon the number of lessons the participant chose to complete.

In addition to classroom activities that were held at the University of Illinois Extension office in Pontiac, the workshop included one day on the road for a field trip. "I think everyone enjoyed tour day," said Ruff. "On the way to Decatur, we showed videos that we have available for classroom use and we also played 'Windshield I Spy' of various farming practices, implements, and crops. That day, we had good tours at Archer Daniels Midland and Illinois Farm Bureau, great speakers, and good food."

The goal of *From Seed to Store* was to show teachers the complete cycle of a seed, such as a corn kernel, oat seed, wheat kernel, or soybean seed. "We took the seed from being planted in the soil, to its season-long growth process, to its being harvested and then transported to an elevator or processing plant, to being made into a product that we purchase at the grocery, fuel pump, or feed store," said Ruff. "We hope that these teachers now understand the farming industry a little better and see that sustaining our natural resources is the most important thing that must be done to ensure adequate food, fiber, and fuel for future generations -- and ultimately, that the 20 teachers who participated in the workshop will bring this information to their students so they can become better informed stewards of our resources and more knowledgeable consumers." 🌱

For more information, contact Debbie Ruff (815-844-6127; Debra.Ruff@il.nacdn.net).

Photos in this article were taken by Teresa Grant-Quick.



A corn product luncheon was presented to demonstrate the diversity of corn products.



One activity used everyday 'throwaway' products to teach about soil erosion.

4

The Effect of Small-Grain Cover Crops on Yield of Corn in Northern Illinois

Cover crops can reduce soil erosion and increase nutrient levels in the soil, but what effect do they have on yield? That's the question Jim Morrison wanted to try to answer. He received a mini-grant in order to help him fund a research project on cover crops. Morrison is a University of Illinois Extension educator in Rockford. For this preliminary project, he collaborated with Emerson Nafziger, from the U of I Department of Crop Sciences; John Church, Extension educator, Natural Resources Management; and Lyle Paul, agronomist in the U of I Department of Crop Sciences.

"The primary goal of this project is to compare the performance of two small grains as cover crops seeded in the fall following soybean and document their impact on corn yield," said Morrison. The two cover crops Morrison used in the study are winter rye and winter wheat. "The project is designed to compare the two small-grain species, and not varieties." Morrison said that small-grain yield (dry matter per acre) and quality (crude protein, acid detergent fiber, neutral detergent fiber, relative feed value, etc.) will be measured at various intervals to provide data for producers considering spring grazing of wheat or rye.

The study is being conducted at the Northern Illinois Agronomy Research Center in Shabbona. The soil type in that region is El Paso silty clay loam.

THE PROJECT

Winter rye and winter wheat were seeded on October 6, 2004, following soybean harvest on October 4. Seeding rate for rye and wheat was 112 and 120 pounds per acre, respectively.

Pioneer 34B24 (YGCB) was planted May 6, 2005, at 34,000 plants per acre. Force insecticide was applied at planting time.

No nitrogen was applied to the small grain in the fall 2004 or spring 2005. However, 180 pounds of nitrogen per acre as urea ammonium nitrate was dribble applied in late May to the corn.

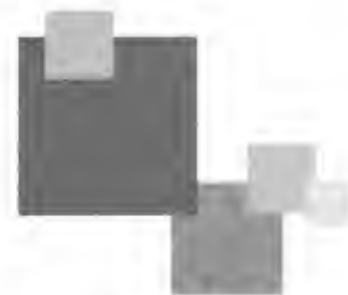




Sustainable Agriculture Travel Scholarship Program

A travel scholarship program has been developed to provide educators (Extension, Natural Resources Conservation Service, and other agricultural educators in the governmental, for profit and non-profit sectors) with resources to increase their awareness, knowledge, attitudes and skills in order to develop and deliver programs and activities that enhance the sustainability of rural communities and the food and agricultural system. A total of \$6,000 in travel scholarships will be awarded each year on a first come, first served basis, at up to \$500 per scholarship. Matching funds (50/50) must be provided from other sources (county funds, specialization funds, etc.). Travel scholarships may be used to support participation in conferences, tours, and other programs as well as visits to study issues or programs with researchers, Extension personnel, educational institutions, foundations, or farm families. Proposals may be submitted at any time during the year and should be submitted at least 30 days before to the proposed travel activity. Applicants must complete a Travel Scholarship Application. A downloadable form is available at <http://www.aces.uiuc.edu/asap/>.

For more information, contact Deborah Cavanaugh-Grant, SARE Coordinator (217-968-5512; cvnghgrn@uiuc.edu).



The study consisted of four treatments and five replications. Roundup® herbicide was applied 30, 20, or 10 days before planting [dbp] corn, and tillage was done two days before planting corn.


Monthly rainfall at the Research Center during the 2005 growing season has been: March 0.51 inch, April 1.37 inches, May 2.08 inches, June 2.87 inches, July 1.86 inches, August 3.36, and through September 25, 1.29 inches.

RESULTS TO DATE

"Wheat produced less dry matter than rye but was a more 'benign' cover crop, in that corn following wheat yielded about 21 bushels per acre more than corn following rye," said Nafziger. "This resulted from the vigorous growth of the rye compared to wheat and more removal of soil water by the rye cover crop in a dry spring period."

"For corn grain yield, the earlier the cover crop was killed the better," said Morrison. "Spraying 30 days before planting produced corn yields about 36 bushels per acre more than spraying 10 days before planting on average, but the effect was much greater in rye than in wheat."

Morrison reported that tillage to control the cover crop gave unsatisfactory results compared to use of herbicide and resulted in lower corn yields than any of the sprayed treatments.

"Much of the yield loss from cover crops killed late was probably due to the cover crops' drying out the soil in an already dry spring," said Nafziger. "Though we do not expect this to happen routinely, it does point out one of the drawbacks to use of cover crops." 

For more information, contact Jim Morrison (815-397-7714; morrison@uiuc.edu).

Photo by Brian Stauffer.

University of Illinois USDA NCR SARE Mini-Grants

2005 Mini-Grant Recipients

Locally Grown/Locally Good Festival
(Carrie Edgar; Adams/Brown Unit)

Advancing Alternative Agriculture in
Fulton County: Phase 2 (Rhonda Ferree;
Fulton County Extension)

From Seed to Store (Debra Ruff;
Livingston County Soil and Water
Conservation District)

The Effect of Small Grain Cover Crops
(Jim Morrison; Rockford Extension
Center)

Planting Seeds, Feeding Minds and
Cultivating Healthy Choices (Jennifer
Fishburn; Sangamon-Menard Unit)

On-Farm Composting Workshop
(Duane Friend; Springfield Extension
Center)

Growing Together Community
Garden (Kasey Murphy; McHenry
County Extension)

Western Illinois Grazing and Livestock
Symposium (Dean Oswald; Macomb
Extension Center)

Organic Gardening to Sustainable
Agriculture: An Introduction for Urban
and Suburban Educators (Steve Tiwald;
Green Earth Institute)

Chicago Fresh and Home Grown (Carol
Williams; John Marshall Agriculture/Hor-
ticulture Academy)

Share Your Knowledge and Harvest
(Linda Fitzgerald; Kendall County
Extension)

Lake Katherine Heritage Gardens
Interpretive Signs and Brochures
(Nancy Pollard; Cook South/Suburban
Unit)

A mini-grant program has been developed to provide educators (including personnel from Extension, Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), other governmental agencies, and non-governmental organizations and educators from the non-profit and for-profit sectors serving the food and fiber system) with resources to develop and deliver programs and activities that enhance the sustainability of rural and urban communities and the food and agricultural system. University of Illinois has approximately \$12,000 for mini-grants made available through USDA NCR SARE Professional Development Program funds.

The mini-grant program supports educational programs and activities that enhance the sustainability of agriculture and communities in Illinois. Appropriate outputs include projects that seek to implement community activities, production practices, financial planning or stewardship activities that improve the viability of Illinois agriculture and communities.

To achieve these products, educators from units including U of I Extension and NRCS, as well as other agricultural educators in the governmental, for-profit and non-profit sectors, are invited to submit proposals in support of educational programs, events, activities, demonstrations, and other innovative educational projects.

Competitive grants of up to \$1,000 are available. Funds can be spent between May 1, 2006 and April 30, 2007.

Priority will be given to project proposals with evidence of partnering and coordination among groups, organizations, and/or agencies. This may include offering educational programs at multiple locations.

APPLICATION REQUIREMENTS

There are two main components to an application:

A. Project Proposal. The project proposal consists of general information and questions to be answered. Proposals should be typed or printed in dark ink. The proposal must include the following elements:

Cover Page

- Project Title
- Contact information: Project Leader; Address; Phone; fax; e-mail
- Partners and/or collaborators
- Mini-grant funds requested, including the dollar amount
- Matching funds and source, including the dollar amount

■ Project Description.

The applicant should write a brief statement or paragraph to answer each of the following questions:

- What are the intended educational outcomes of the project?
(Describe who is intended to benefit from the educational event and what you would anticipate the person or persons to do as a result of participating.)
- What is the output or action plan to accomplish the intended outcomes? (Describe briefly the actions and/or events that will occur to support the educational outcomes.)
- What is the evaluation plan to determine if your educational outcomes have been achieved?
(Describe indicators that will help determine if your outcomes have been successfully accomplished.)

B. Budget request. Submit a complete budget with narrative to explain planned expenditures is needed.

	Mini Grant Contributions	Other Contributions
Travel	_____	_____
Operating and supplies	_____	_____
Other expenses	_____	_____
TOTAL	_____	_____

Budget narrative (explain expenses):

■ APPLICATION PROCEDURE

Proposals must be emailed no later than 5:00 p.m. February 15, 2006. Decisions will be given by March 15. Proposals need to be submitted electronically to: Deborah Cavanaugh-Grant at cvnghgrn@uiuc.edu. Phone 217-968-5512 for more information.


■ APPLICATION EVALUATION

Proposals will be reviewed by a subcommittee of the University of Illinois SARE PDP Planning Committee. Funding recommendations will be based upon well defined educational outcomes; effective plan of action; potential benefit or outcome of the project; appropriateness of the budget; cooperation among producer groups, organizations, or agencies in planning and delivering the project; and potential contribution to the profitability and/or stewardship of Illinois producers. Projects involving community food systems, etc. will also be considered.

■ REPORTING

A brief report outlining the accomplishments toward the intended outcomes is required within 30 days of completion of the educational project. This narrative can be written similar to annual accomplishment reports. 62

2006 Illinois Tillage Seminars



Tillage & Nutrient Management: Economics & Environmental Stewardship is the theme for the 2006 Illinois Regional Tillage Seminars which will take place at five locations throughout Illinois.

The seminars are co-sponsored by the Illinois Department of Agriculture, University of Illinois Extension, AISWCD, Natural Resources Conservation Service, and the Soil and Water Conservation Districts. Some tillage seminars will include agribusiness exhibitors. The Illinois Tillage Seminars will provide continuing education credit hours for Certified Crop Advisers.

Pre-registration is necessary and the deadline is one week prior to each scheduled meeting. Seating is limited so registration will be taken on a first-come basis. A \$12 per person fee will be charged to cover room rental and noon luncheon. To register, include the following information with your check: Name of Meeting-Tillage Seminar, your name, address and county of residence. Make your check payable to the agency that is handling registration for that seminar location.

For general information, contact Bob Frazee, U of I Natural Resources Educator (309-694-7501, Ext. 226) or Alan Gulso, Water Quality Coordinator, Illinois Department of Agriculture (217-782-6297).

Below are the dates, locations, registration information and a phone number for each seminar.

February 6, Klehm Arboretum, Rockford

Send registrations to:

Winnebago County Extension, 4311 W. State, Rockford, IL 61102
(815-986-4357).

February 7, Celebrations 150, Peru

Send registrations to:

LaSalle County Extension, 1689 N 31st Rd., Ste 2, Ottawa, IL 61350
(815-433-0707).

February 8, Holiday Inn, Urbana

Send registrations to:

Champaign County Extension, 801 N Country Fair Dr., Ste D, Champaign, IL 61821
(217-333-7672).

February 9, Monroe Extension Office, Waterloo

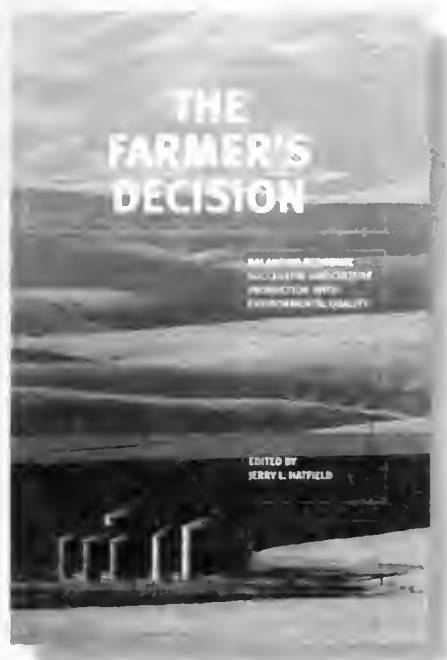
Send registrations to:

Monroe County Extension, 901 Illinois Ave., PO Box 117, Waterloo, IL 62298
(618-939-3434).

February 10, Evergreen Christian Church, Salem

Send registrations to:

Marion County Extension, 1404 E. Main, Rt 150 East, Salem, IL 62881
(618-548-1446). ☎



New Book Is a Decision-Making Tool

Decision support tools have been used in many areas for decades to help people make decisions that yield the wanted outcomes. Applying decision-support tools to agriculture production has recently become an increasing development. *The Farmer's Decision: Balancing Economic Successful Agriculture Production with Environmental Quality* is one of the first books to tackle the decision-making process when a producer or landowner wants to balance making money and environmental quality. It looks at the decision support tools the farmer and rancher can now use from several perspectives—the researcher's point of view; the farmer's point of view; the equipment manufacturer's point of view; and finally from a strictly nutrient management point of view.


The Farmer's Decision is published by the Soil and Water Conservation Society. To order a copy, call 1-800-THE-SOIL, ext.10, or email pubs@swcs.org. The price is \$35.00 per copy plus \$18.00 shipping and handling.

Case Studies on DVD to Spark Discussion

Architecture to Zucchini: The people, companies and organizations pioneering sustainability is a collection of 12 business and organization case studies on DVD. Segments range in running time from six to 15 minutes. The stories can be used as catalysts for discussion within higher education and business/community groups as a way to share the lessons learned by leaders in sustainability.

A trailer, reviews, details, user/buyer lists and ordering information is available at <http://www.arnoldcreekproductions.com>.

USDA Update on Organics

USDA's Economic Research has just released *U.S. Organic Agriculture in the U.S., 1992-2003*, www.ers.usda.gov/Data/Organic/index.htm. This product updates USDA estimates of U.S. organic acreage and livestock numbers to 2002 and 2003. This product is also posted in the ERS briefing room on organic farming and marketing, visit www.ers.usda.gov/briefing/organic. 

CALENDAR

January 17 — 19

Illinois Specialty Crops Conference
Crowne Plaza Hotel
Springfield, Illinois


Concurrent sessions will be offered on fruits, vegetables and herbs with additional workshops on irrigation, risk management, and labor issues. A one-day post-conference workshop on tomatoes and sweet corn will be held on January 19, and will cover production, pest management, and marketing issues. The conference is jointly sponsored by the Illinois Specialty Growers Association, University of Illinois Extension, and USDA Risk Management Agency.

The conference agenda can be reviewed at www.specialtygrowers.org.
For more information, contact Diane Handley (309-557-2107; handley@ilfb.org).

January 27 — 28

Midwest Value Added Agriculture Conference
Plaza Hotel and Suites
Eau Claire, Wisconsin

Farmers and landowners interested in increasing or diversifying the profit from their farm or small acreage, will benefit from attending this conference. It is an opportunity to learn and talk to those who are exploring new ways of developing and marketing their products. The conference will include information on how to write a business plan, market as a group, choose between alternative enterprises and where to get start up funds and get a loan.

For more about the conference, contact Heather Flashinski at 715-834-9672 or visit www.rivercountryrca.org/valad.htm. 

AGRO-ECOLOGY

News and Perspectives

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